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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

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English-language version produced by Studio Proteus for Dark Horse Comics, Inc.

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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story
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translation
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lettering and retouch
Tomoko Saito

Autumn Frost

DARK HORSE MANGA™

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Swastika

The main character in *Blade of the Immortal*, Manji, has taken the "crux gammata" as both his name and his personal symbol. This symbol is also known as the *swastika*, a name derived from the Sanskrit *svastika* (meaning "welfare," from *su* — "well" + *asti* "he is"). As a symbol of prosperity and good fortune, the swastika was widely used throughout the ancient world (for example, appearing often on Mesopotamian coinage), including North and South America and has been used in Japan as a symbol of Buddhism since ancient times. To be precise, the symbol generally used by Japanese Buddhists is the *sauvastika*, which moves in a counterclockwise direction and is called the *manji* in Japanese. The arms of the *swastika*, which point in a clockwise direction, are generally considered a solar symbol. It was this version (the *hakenkreuz*) that was perverted by the Nazis. The *sauvastika* generally stands for night, and often for magical practices. It is important that readers understand that the swastika has ancient and honorable origins, and it is those that apply to this story, which takes place in the 18th century [ca. 1782–3]. *There is no anti-Semitic or pro-Nazi meaning behind the use of the symbol in this story. Those meanings did not exist until after 1910.*

The Artwork

The creator of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Normally, Westernized manga are first copied in a mirror-image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and re-pasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used.

The Sound Effects & Dialogue

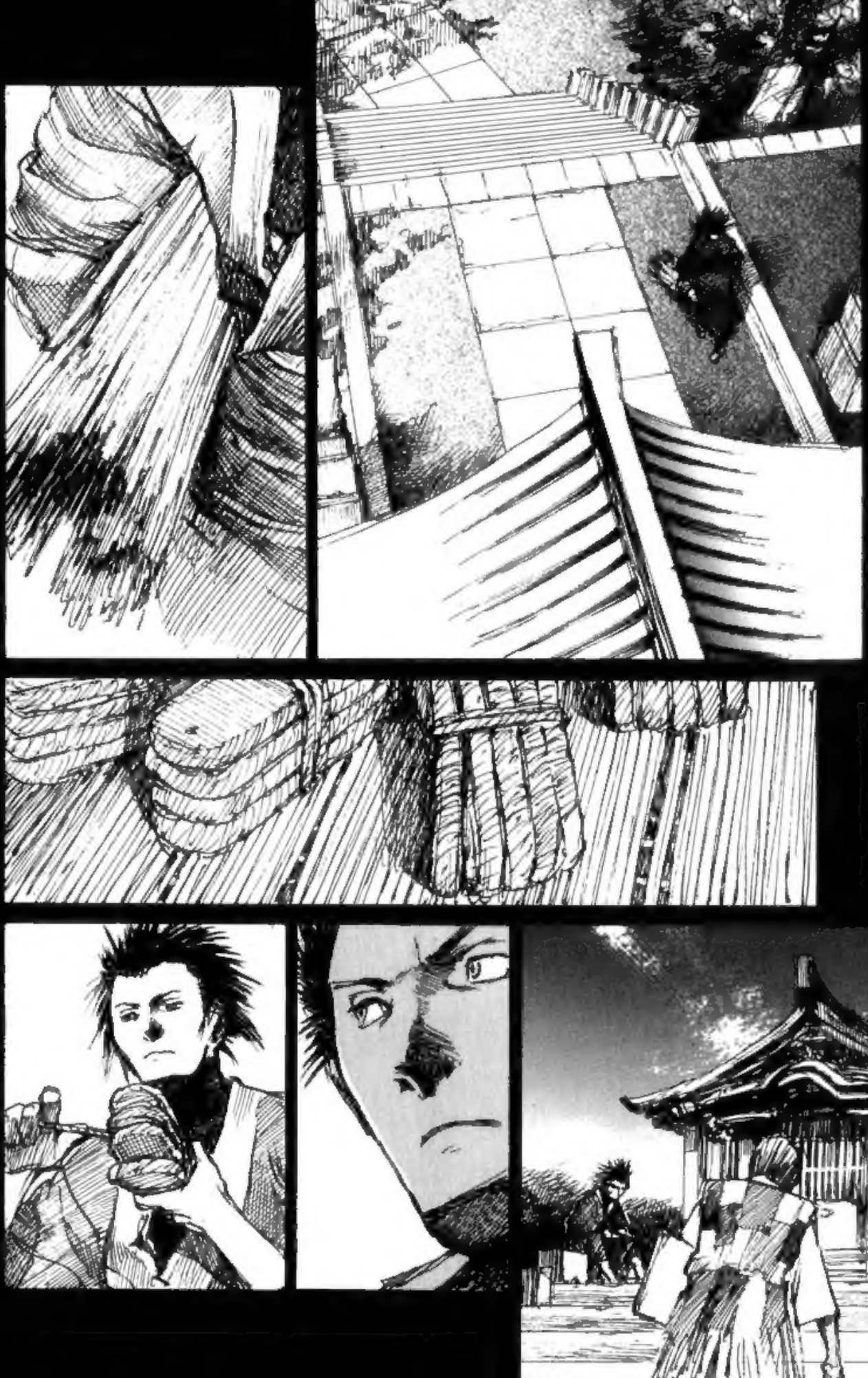
Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the illustrations, we decided to leave those in their original Japanese. We hope readers will view the unretouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in typical samurai manga and is considered to be one of the features that has made *Blade* such a hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this fantasy story, with some characters speaking in the mannered style of old Japan while others speak as if they were street-corner punks from a bad area of modern-day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.

AUTUMN FROST
Part 1

A GUY WEARING THAT...? NAW, NOT HERE.
OH, WELL. THANKS ANYWAY.
BY THE WAY... NEED SOME SANDALS?
NOPE. GOT PLENTY.

WALKING AROUND ALL DAY, EVERY DAY...
LIVING ON RICE AND GREENS...
.....
.....
MAN...
THIS IS GETTING OLD.

DIDN'T THINK IT'D BE SO HARD TO LIVE WITHOUT USING MY SWORD.
GO BACK TO THE FARM, MAYBE...?
HUH... TALKING ABOUT WIMPING OUT... NO WAY!
JUST YOU WAIT, O-REN...



.....
HMM...
!

I AM AN ARTIST, AS YOU CAN SEE.
DON'T MIND ME. JUST CARRY ON.
.....
.....
.....

THE SAMURAI, DOWN ON HIS LUCK, DOES WHAT HE HAS TO IN ORDER TO SURVIVE... YES?
I'M NOT A SAMURAI. BUT...
...NOT EXACTLY RŌNIN, EITHER.
THEN... WHAT ARE YOU?
ME...?
WHY SHOULD I TELL YOU?

HRM.
IF YOU DON'T WANT TO, THAT'S FINE.
I DON'T REALLY CARE.
DRAW YOUR LITTLE PICTURES THERE, OKAY?
I CAN'T CON-CENTRATE WITH YOU HERE. SORRY.
LOOK, PAL.
IF YOU WANT TO DRAW CRAFTS-MEN...
...GO DOWN THE ROAD TO TOWN. IT'S FULL OF 'EM.

OH. I HEARD YOU.
HEY. ARE YOU LIS--
I JUST FINISHED.
THANK YOU FOR COOPERAT-ING.
.....
.....
WANT TO SEE?

壹.
貳.
參.
I'M PARTIC-ULARLY FOND OF NUMBER THREE.
WHAT DO YOU TH MK?
I LIKE YOUR HEAD. EXEMPLARY REBELLION.
IN TWO HUNDRED YEARS, YOUR STYLE WILL BE ALL THE RAGE.
.....
.....?
I WAS EXTRA-POLATING HAIR STYLES.

AH?!
RRRIP
HEY, BUDDY.
I WANNA HAVE A LITTLE *TALK* WITH YOU. OUT BACK OF THE SHRINE.
AND SO...?
WELL, SHIT... I WASN'T GOING TO CUT HIM UP.
JUST THOUGHT I'D KNOCK SOME SENSE INTO HIM. SO I GAVE HIM A WOODEN PRACTICE SWORD.

AND WHO LOST...?
.....
.....
ME.
HAW HAW HAW
HAW HAW HAW
C'MON-- IT'S ECHOING OFF THE HILLS!
CUT IT OUT, MAN! IT AIN'T *THAT* FUNNY!

COME ON, MANJI.
YOU KNOW HIM, TOO, RIGHT? WHAT HE'S *REALLY* LIKE?
HEH HEH
YEAH, I KNOW HIM.
STILL, THAT'S PRETTY DAMN FUNNY. THE HOT-SHIT YOUNG BLADE TRIES TO THUMP SOME GEEZER, AND GETS HIS BUTT KICKED-UP, DOWN, AND SIDEWAYS. HOW COME YOU AIN'T CUT YOUR BELLY...?
GET REAL.
SMART ASS
AND SO... WHAT HAPPENED?
YOU FLUNG YOURSELF AT HIS FEET? "OH, MASTER! I ADORE YOUR SWORDWORK! MAKE ME YOUR STUDENT!"
I DID *NOT!*
LAY OFF ME, PAL!
ALTHOUGH... A *MONTH* AGO, WHO KNOWS? BUT NO TIME FOR THAT, NOW.
HOH... THIS MAN KILLED YOUR *FRIEND*?
LET'S SEE...

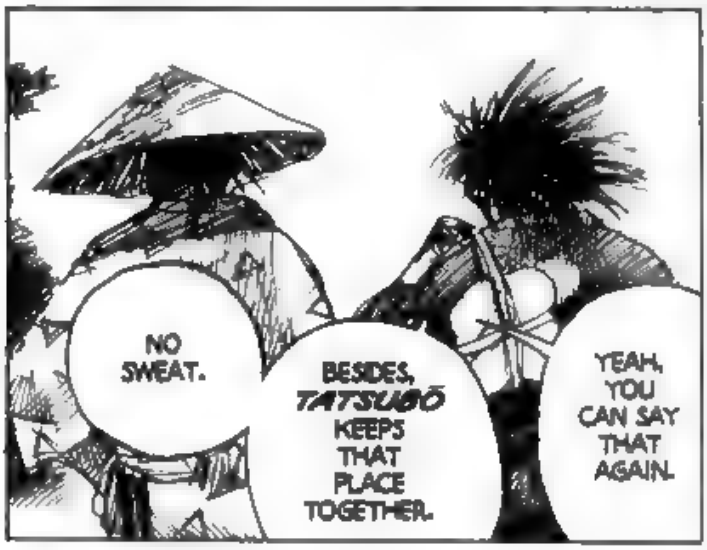
SORRY. DON'T KNOW HIM.
TRY SOMEONE ELSE.
I COULD TELL HE WAS LYING.
BUT WHAT I DON'T GET IS... WHY DID HE *NEED* TO LIE?
SO I *ACTED* LIKE A STUDENT. FIGURED MAYBE IF I *LIVED* WITH HIM, HE'D SHOW HIS TRUE COLORS...
MAKE HIM TALK? *THAT* GUY?
NO WAY.

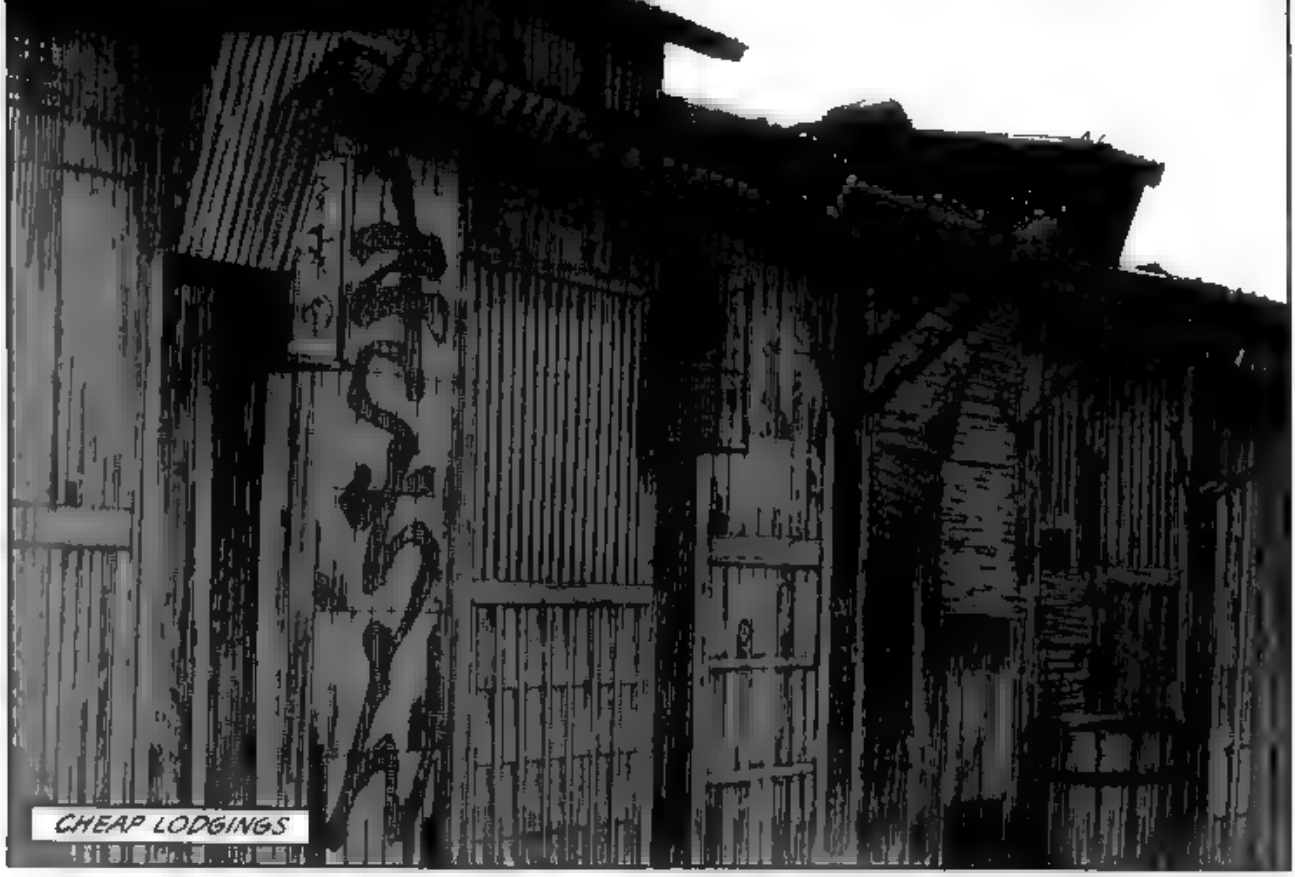
DAMN, THE KID'S SHARP. BUT IF SŌRI-SENSEI WANTS TO PLAY HIM THAT WAY...
...I WON'T GET INVOLVED.

SO, MAGATSU... IS THIS COOL? US HITTING THE ROAD?
HUH?

WHADDA YA MEAN, "HUH?"
YOU'RE HIS STUDENT, RIGHT? AND YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE GUARDING HIS HOUSE!

HEH HEH SPEAKING OF SWEET LITTLE TATSU, MANJI MY FRIEND
I HEARD SHE WAS YOUR "MOMMY" WHEN YOU WERE SICK
!?!
YOU -!
WHY THAT LITTLE - HOW MUCH DID SHE TELL YOU?!


NO SWEAT.
BESIDES, TATSUBŌ KEEPS THAT PLACE TOGETHER.
YEAH, YOU CAN SAY THAT AGAIN.


CHEAP LODGINGS

TWO...
THREE...
TWENTY-FOUR RYŌ...!!
SHIT... HAVEN'T SEEN THIS MUCH DOUGH FOR YEARS!

EIGHT EACH
YOU'RE SOMETHING ELSE, MAN. YOU REALLY SERIOUS?

HEH, HEH... WHY NOT?
I LIVE MODESTLY.

SO... GOT IT? ONE EYE. SCAR LIKE THIS. HE'S ALL I WANT.
DON'T WORRY ABOUT ANYONE ELSE WITH HIM.
I CAME ALL THIS WAY TO KILL HIM.
BUT HE'S IN A HURRY, SEE? HE WON'T WANT TO FIGHT.
THAT'S WHERE YOU COME IN. WON'T TAKE MUCH-- JUST GET IN THE WAY A LITTLE.
SLOW HIM DOWN.

ONCE THE SWORDS COME OUT...
...SIT BACK AND ENJOY. I DON'T NEED HELP.
EASY, YES?
UH... SO WE JUST, UH...
LIKE... HOW GOOD IS THIS GUY?
I MEAN, I SHOULDN'T SAY THIS AFTER TAKING YOUR MONEY, BUT...
...IF WE'RE RISKING OUR LIVES... Y'KNOW?
EIGHT RYÖ'S PRETTY... GENER-OUS.
TRUST ME, GUYS.
IT'S ALL COOL.

OKAY, I DON'T KNOW ABOUT ONE-ON-ONE...
...BUT TWO OF YOU CAN TAKE HIM, EASY.

IN THAT CASE...
YEAH, BUT...

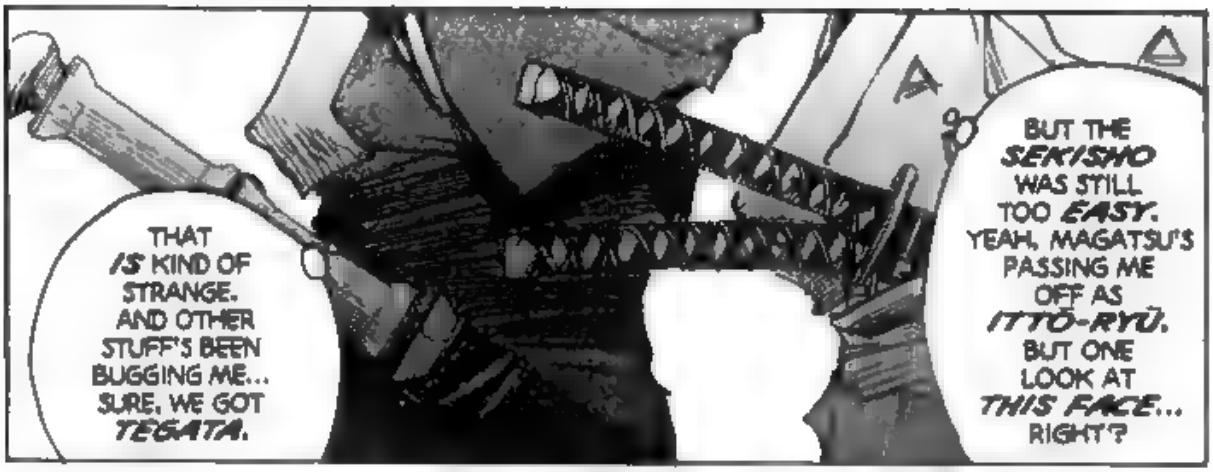
WHY ALL OF US? AND ALL THIS CASH? I MEAN, IF HE'S JUST--

YOU STUPID ASSHOLES ARE DRIVING ME NUTS!!
QUIT JERKING AROUND!! ARE YOU IN OR OUT?!

NO FREE RIDES IN LIFE, MAN!
DECIDE! NOW !!

.....
.....
.....
GEE. Uh... SORRY. I GUESS... YEAH.
WE WANT THE MONEY.
IT'S WEIRD, MANJI...
WHAT IS?

A FEW DAYS AGO, THEY SAID THERE WERE "WANTED" POSTERS.
YOU AND YOUR LITTLE FRIEND, ALL OVER KOBOTOKE.
BUT I HAVEN'T SEEN ANY...
SO? MAYBE IT WAS JUST A RUMOR.
YOU DISAPPOINTED OR SOMETHING?
HMM... COME TO THINK OF IT...


THAT *IS* KIND OF STRANGE. AND OTHER STUFF'S BEEN BUGGING ME... SURE, WE GOT *TEGATA*.
BUT THE *SEKISHO* WAS STILL TOO *EASY*. YEAH, MAGATSU'S PASSING ME OFF AS *ITTŌ-RYŪ*. BUT ONE LOOK AT *THIS FACE*... RIGHT?

HMM. MAYBE... IT'S *HER*?
SOME-ONE'S PULLING STRINGS.

MAKING UP FOR THE LAST TIME...? DAMN, SHE'S A CUNNING BITCH.
SHE TOLD HER BOSSES I'M A *KENKYAKU* OUT TO KILL ANOTSU?

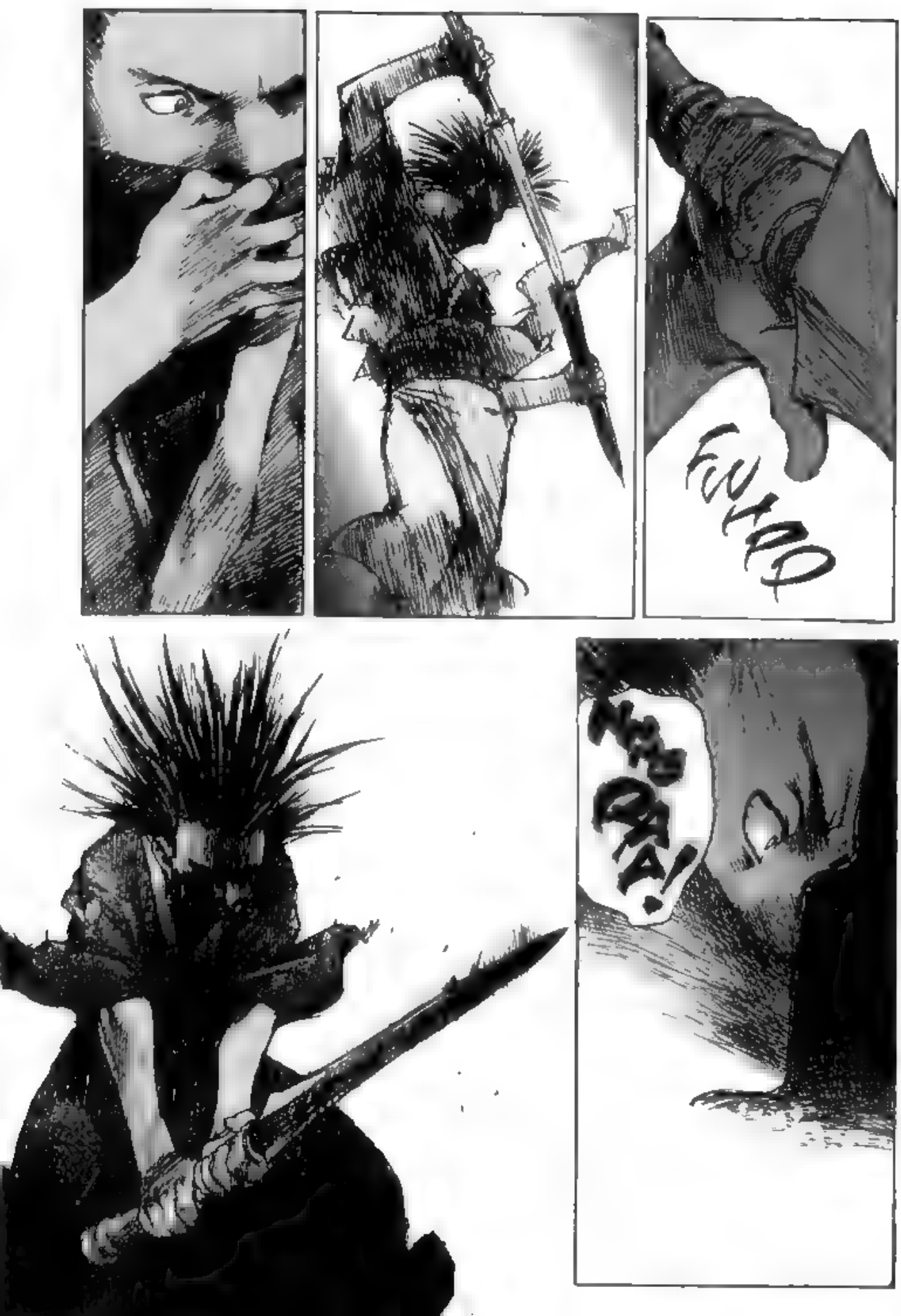
WHEW... WE'VE PUT ON SOME MILES. IF I WALK ALL THE WAY TO *KAGA* WITH YOU...
...I'LL FEEL LIKE A REAL *DUMB-SHIT*.

YOU'RE DUMB ENOUGH ALREADY! TWO DAYS?
IT TAKES A GROWN MAN TEN DAYS TO GET THERE! HOLD YOUR DAMN HORSES, PUNK!
WE'LL REACH UENOHARA SOON.
BUT I DON'T SUPPOSE...
THAT WE'LL TAKE A BREAK? NOT A CHANCE, KIDDO.
YOU'RE JOKING, RIGHT...?
NOPE! WE'RE NOT STOPPING UNTIL KONISHI. FOUR MORE ON! START WALKING!
WELL, SHIT.
HOW COME YOU'RE ALL STEAMED UP?
IT PISSES ME OFF JUST WATCHING YOU.
ALL WORKED UP OVER SOME GIRL...

SHE'S YOUNG ENOUGH TO BE YOUR SISTER, TOO!
I HATE THAT, MAN. HATE IT.
IT'S LIKE LOOKING IN A MIRROR.
YOU TALK TOO FRIGGIN' MUCH!
NOT SO FAST... WE CAN'T BE SURE FROM UP HERE.
NO, NO, I THINK I SAW A SCAR. THAT'S GOOD ENOUGH.

AND THE OTHER GUY? WHO'S HE?
HOW SHOULD I KNOW? JUST SHOOT THE DAMN ARROW!
KAKK
TONGO

Ehh!
WHOO


FWAPP
HAHAHA!

STAY RIGHT THERE, YOU BASTARDS !!

AUTUMN FROST

Part 2

GAH HAH HAH HAH!
YOU SURE KEPT ME WAITING, MANJI OLD BUDDY!
DAMN!

AW, SHIT... MY FRIGGIN' ARM AGAIN?
NOT AGAIN!
BWA HAHAHA HAHA!

HEY, SORRY 'BOUT THAT, MANJI. HERE IT'S OUR BIG REUNION, ALL THAT CRAP... AND WHAM!
LOOK WHAT HAPPENS.
RRNGG...

STILL, WE GOT A LOT OF BAD SHIT BETWEEN US, RIGHT?
ME AND YOU.

ME HACKING A COUPLE OF LAME ITTŌ-RYŪ KENSHI... HAVING A LITTLE FUN SLICING UP SOME CHEAP SLUT... YOU CHOPPING MY ARM OFF... YEAH...
...AND THEN I LEFT YOU AND THAT DUMBASS GIRL BEHIND TO TAKE THE FALL! HAH!
...?
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING, PAL?
OH! OH, YEAH! I GET IT! YEAH!
IT WAS LIKE THAT FOR ME, TOO. FEELS LIKE YOU CAN STICK IT RIGHT BACK ON, LONG AS IT'S WARM.

WELL, IT DON'T WORK, SHIT FOR BRAINS. YOU'RE NOT A DAMN CRAB!
CRABS CAN DO THAT...?
'COURSE, WE'RE A STONE'S THROW FROM UENOHARA. TAKE IT WITH YOU, FIND A DOC.
MAYBE YOU'D BE AS GOOD AS NEW.
BUT IT AIN'T GONNA HAPPEN!
UH, GUYS. GUYS...?
LOOKS LIKE IT'S SORTA, OVER, RIGHT?
AND OUR JOB, TOO. SO, LIKE... UH...
SHH!!

Y'KNOW, DUDE...
I GOT THIS FEELING... I'VE *SEEN* YOU BEFORE. THAT UGLY *MASK* THING.
BUT TODAY'S THE FIRST TIME WE'VE *MET*.
YEAH. MAYBE.
LISTEN, YOU WHITE-HAIRED *FREAK*.
IS IT? SO WHO GIVES A SHIT? PISS OFF!

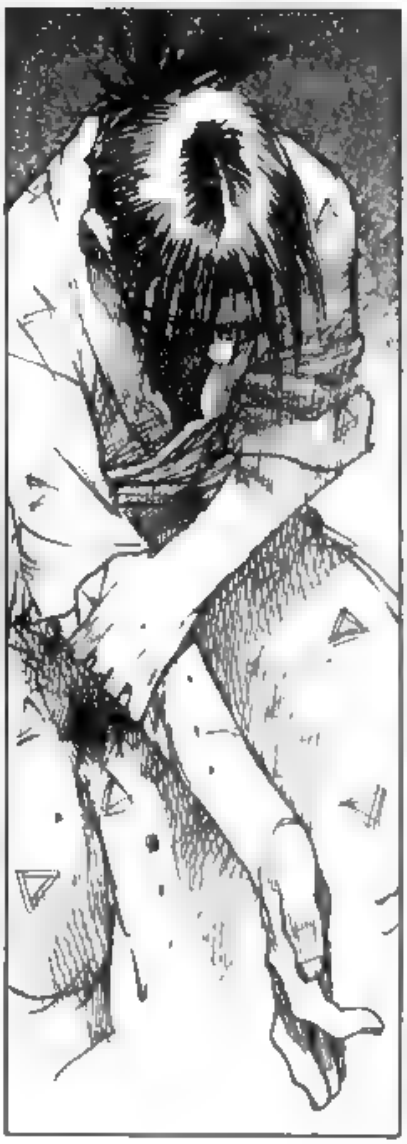
DID YOU HIRE THOSE DICKHEADS UP THERE?
YEAH. MAYBE.
HOW MUCH DID YOU PAY 'EM?
TWENTY-FOUR RYŌ. EIGHT EACH.
BUT I ONLY PAID HALF UP FRONT. SO? WHAT'S IT TO YOU?
JUST CHECKING. WELL, YOU BETTER GO PAY 'EM OFF.
I'LL WAIT, NO PROB.

BECAUSE IN A FEW MINUTES, YOU'RE GONNA BE *DEAD.*
AND DEAD MEN DON'T NEED MONEY... RIGHT?

WHAT THE F-?! WHAT'S WITH *YOU,* DUDE?
YOU *STUPID* OR SOME-THIN'?

LOOK... I GOT SOME SERIOUS BUSINESS WITH THAT SCAR-FACED GUY SQUIRMING AROUND OVER THERE. FIGHT SOME DAMN KID I NEVER MET BEFORE...? FORGET IT!
CLIMB THE HILL AND GO PLAY WITH THOSE THREE MONKEYS UP IN THE TREES.

HEY, MANJI!
IF THIS JERK'S REALLY A *FRIEND* OF YOURS, TALK SOME SENSE INTO HIM. HE'S TOTALLY *WACKO*, MAN. I--



.....
.....
HEH HEH

EVERYTHING WAS GOING PRETTY MUCH ACCORDING TO PLAN FOR YOU. AND NOW...
HEH HEH HEH...
CHECK IT OUT-- NEVER BEEN BETTER.
YOU *TALK* TOO MUCH.
DON'T YA, SHIRA...?
HO-LEE *SHIT!!* B-BUT IT WAS... WASN'T IT?

WHAT THE... WAIT A SEC...
WHAT *IS* THIS SHIT?
SORRY, PAL.
JUST THE WAY I *AM*, Y'KNOW? GUESS I "FORGOT" TO MENTION IT WHEN WE WERE TEAMED UP.
THEN... HEH, HEH
LEMME GET THIS STRAIGHT--
--I CAN HACK OFF YOUR *ARMS*, GOUGE OUT YOUR EYES, SLIT YOUR GUTS OPEN...
...AND I CAN STILL KEEP YOU *ALIVE*?! AS LONG AS I *WANT*?!
NOW DO YOU GET IT, MAGATSU?
THAT'S WHAT HE'S *LIKE*.
YEAH. THEN... IT'S HIM *FOR SURE*.
HE'S THE SCUM WHO KILLED REN!

RIGHT, THEN.
HE'S ALL YOURS. HAVE FUN!
YEAH... THANKS.
?!
HEY...?!
HEY, MANJI!
WHAT IS THIS CRAP? WHERE ARE YOU GOING?!
SHUT UP, YOU STUPID ASSHOLE!
MAYBE YOU'VE GOT TIME TO GET ALL BENT OUT OF SHAPE OVER OLD SHIT, BUT I'VE GOT BUSINESS TO DO.
THIS HERE'S MY MAN, MASATSU TAITO.
HEIGHT, WEIGHT, STRENGTH... ALL THE SAME AS ME.
YOU AND ME... SOME OTHER DAY.
OKAY?

WHY YOU...
SON OF A...
I AMBUSHED YOU, MAN! CUT OFF YOUR GOD DAMN ARM!
AND YOU...
.....
.....
YOU DON'T EVEN GIVE A SHIT?!

SORRY, PAL!
YOU'RE FIGHT-ING... ME!
GET OUT OF MY WAY!

SHOG
HEH.
DIE,
YOU--

NGHK!

I SAID
OUT
OF MY
WAY!

FWUDD
...?!

...
UNNG..
MAGATSU, PAL...
...WERE YOU *REALLY* ITTO-RYU?
SH... SHUDDUP.
I THOUGHT HE WAS... *ONE-HANDED.* I-LEFT MYSELF OPEN.
WON'T MAKE... THE SAME MISTAKE... TWICE.
NOT A DAGGER... MAYBE A SPEAR...?
THE HIT FELT... *WEIRD,* THOUGH.
.....
NO.
BOTH GUESSES *WRONG,* MAGATSU.
NOT A DAGGER OR A SPEAR...

FUKUTT

SPLAT
.....
.....
MANJI!
YOU WANT TO PUT SOMEONE ELSE UP AGAINST ME, THAT'S YOUR BUSINESS.
HOLY SHIT...
.....
THOSE ARE HIS...

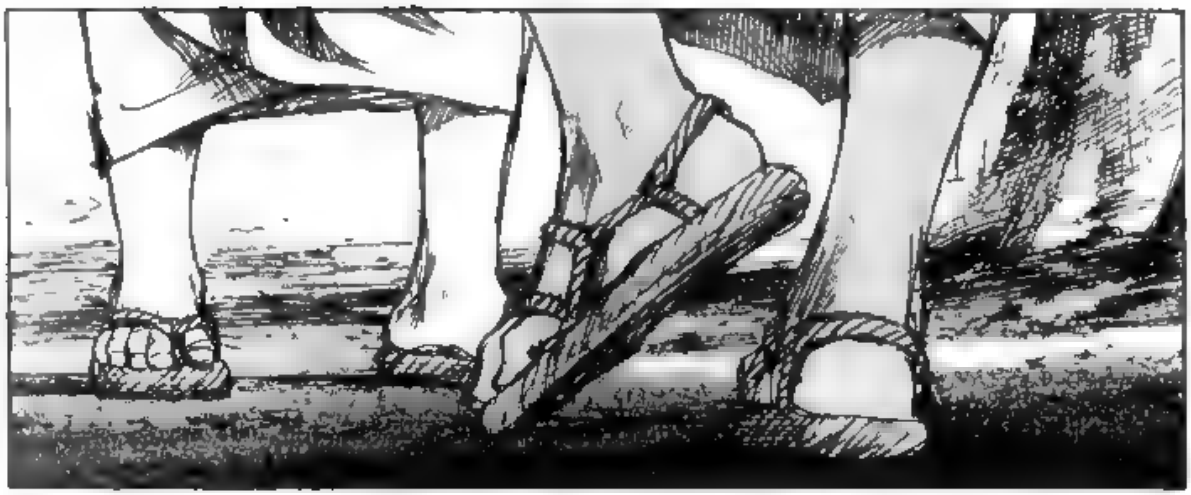
BUT THAT HAND OF MINE...? I DIDN'T LOSE IT TO SOME HALF-ASSED PUNK LIKE THAT KID.
SO DON'T BREAK MY HEART, MAN. FIGHT!
YEAH, OKAY. FAIR ENOUGH.
HEY!

BESIDES, NOW YOU GOT ME *INTEREST-ED*...
...SHIRA, OLD BUDDY.

SO THAT'S WHAT TURNED YOUR HAIR WHITE, HUH? MUST'VE REALLY FELT... INTEREST-ING.
CARVING ALL THAT MEAT RIGHT OFF YOUR BONES...
YEAH... DON'T KNOW HOW MANY TIMES I BLACKED OUT, MAN. AND EVERY TIME MY EYES OPENED AGAIN, I ASKED MYSELF--
--"WHY THE HELL AM I DOING THIS...?" GOOD QUESTION, HUH?
BUT, MANJI... THE MOMENT I SAW YOUR FACE, ALL THOSE DOUBTS, ALL THAT PAIN...
...GONE... LIKE THE MORNING DEW.
AND ANOTHER THING--
--WHEN I ACTUALLY USE IT... GUESS WHAT?

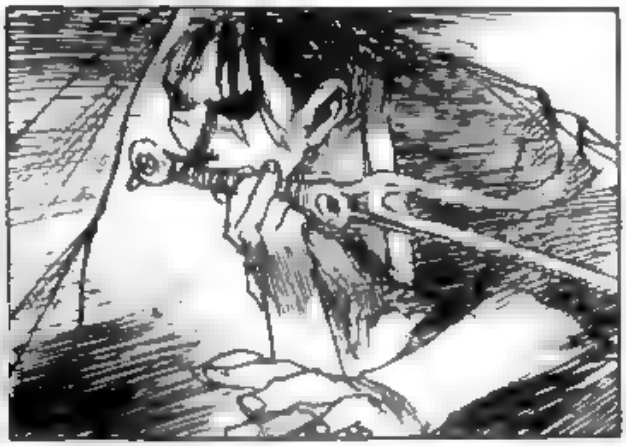
FUCKIN' HURTS LIKE HELL, MAN!
HURTS ME! ME!
I THOUGHT IT'D GO NUMB AFTER A WHILE. BIG MISTAKE.
BUT LIKE... IF I'M TOO GUTLESS TO USE IT, THEN IT'D ALL BE FOR NOTHING... RIGHT?
SO... SINCE IT HURTS SO GODDAMN MUCH TO STAB YOU...
...PUT SOME HEART INTO IT WHEN YOU SCREAM. OKAY, PAL?
WHAT THE HELL IS HE BABBLING ABOUT?
IS HE REALLY NUTS?
NAW... IF YOU BELIEVE RIN'S THEORY...
...THIS PART IS NORMAL.

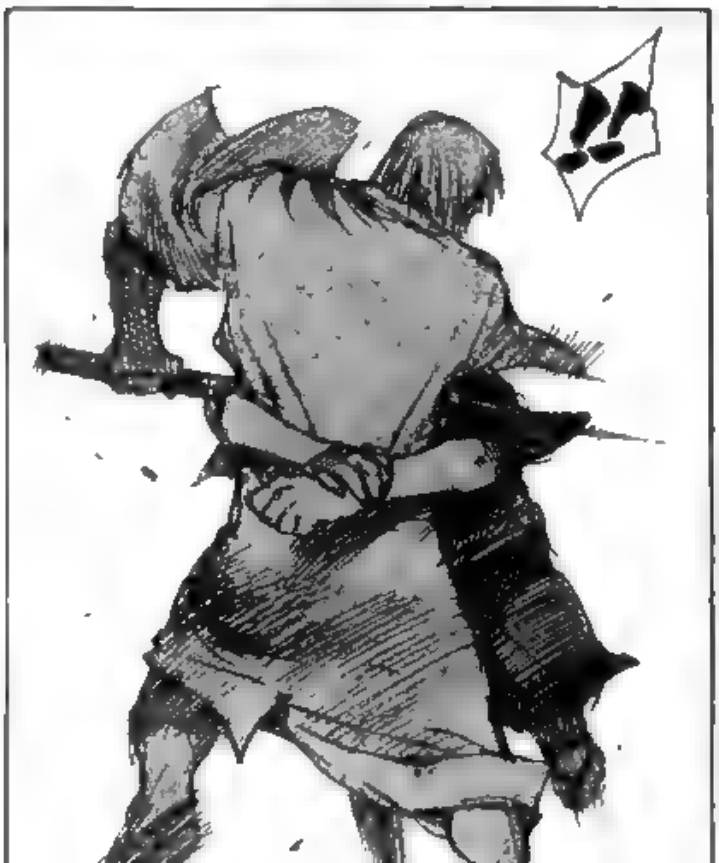
STILL... IT'S ALWAYS NICE TO FEEL *WANTED*... KNOW WHAT I MEAN?
ANYWAY...
YOU'RE THE *REAL DEAL*, SHIRA.
NOW I *CAN'T* LEAVE YOU TO SOMEONE ELSE.



SHANGG

HEH

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WHAT
TH--
?!

NNNG
AAAH!!

.....
.....?
WHA...
WHAT
THE
HELL?

AUTUMN FROST
Part 3

THUK
AH!
YEOWCH!
SHIT
SHIT
SHIT!!
.....
DAMN.

HOLD ON... THAT'S NOT MANJI-*SENSEI*'S.
SO IT'S GOTTA BE...

HAH! MAGATSU TAITO JUST ABOUT PISSED HIM-SELF!
WHEW.
DON'T SCARE ME LIKE THAT, MAN.
THE IMPOR-TANT THING, MAGATSU MY BOY, IS I WAS RIGHT.
"JUST ABOUT PISSED"?
HEY, SCREW YOU!!
WHAT-EVER. WE CAN FIGHT ABOUT IT LATER.
REMEMBER WHAT SHIRA SAID?
IT HURTS LIKE HELL WHEN HE USES IT... RIGHT?
WELL... YEAH. SO...?
I CUT THAT HAND OFF HIM. AND IT WASN'T A YEAR AGO...
...IT WAS ONLY TWO WEEKS AGO.
SO HE'S STILL NOT USED TO IT.
FIGHTING ONE-HANDED, I MEAN.

CARVING DOWN TO THE BONE'S WORKING *AGAINST* HIM, SEE?
IF HE'D ALREADY LEARNED HOW TO KEEP HIS BALANCE, HE WOULDN'T HAVE TUMBLED SO FAR WHEN I NAILED HIM.
AND THAT WAS ON HARD-PACKED *ROAD*. HERE IN THE WOODS, ON SOFT, ROUGH GROUND...
...HE'LL HAVE A HEART ATTACK JUST TRYING TO STAY ON HIS FEET.
"HE WHO HOLDS THE LAND CAN CONQUER HEAVEN." YOU REMEMBER THAT? FIRST TIME WE MET?
IF HE CAN KICK YOUR ASS *HERE*, YOU *OUGHT* TO CUT YOUR BELLY. GET IT?
HUH? I THOUGHT *YOU* WERE FIGHTING HIM NOW.
NOT ME
COME ON!! WHAT THE HELL DID I DRAG YOU OUT HERE FOR?
STUPID KID!

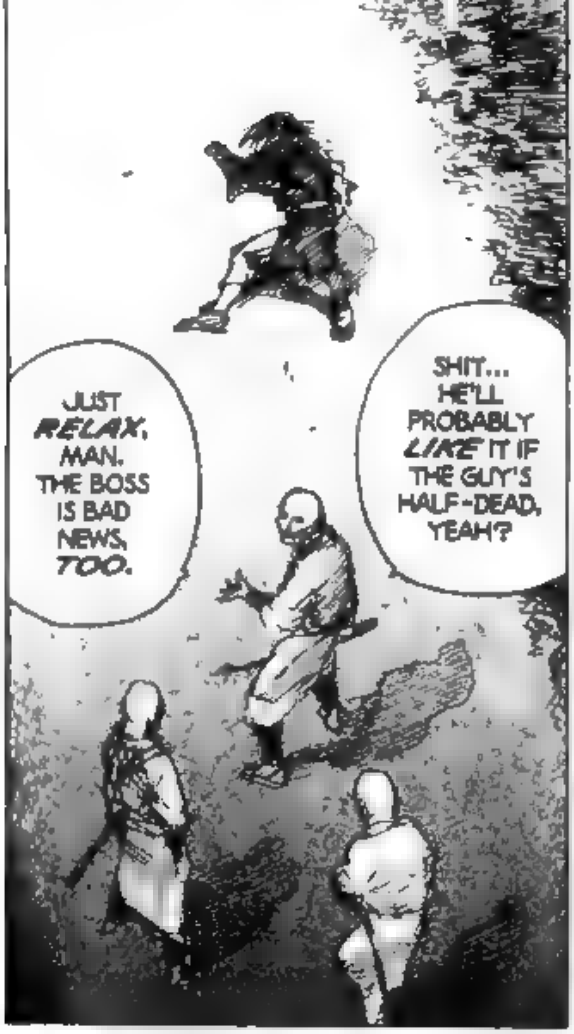
I SAID ALL THAT SHIT JUST TO SHAKE HIM OFF. AND TO GIVE YOU THIS NICE ARENA TO FIGHT IN.
OH, YEAH? AND WHAT KIND OF LOSER IS SO WORRIED ABOUT HIS LITTLE GIRLY HE DOESN'T HAVE TIME TO FIGHT?
MAN... WHAT KIND OF LOSER GETS HIMSELF SLICED AND DICED TO AVENGE SOME WOMAN?
ANYWAY... THIS IS MY LAST FAVOR, KID.
YEAH, WELL... TWO LOSERS ON A ROADTRIP, RIGHT?
SO DON'T WASTE IT.
BWA HAW HAW HAW!
WHAT'S SO FUNNY?! PRETENDING I OWE YOU ONE WHEN I'M PROBABLY SAVING YOUR SORRY ASS?!
YOU THINK THAT'S FUNNY?!

I THINK I SHALL JUST BUTCHER THE BASTARD. THANK YOU OH SO VERY MUCH.
OKAY, OKAY... WHATEVER. YOU'RE TOO KIND.
IT'S BEEN REAL, MANJI, BUT... SEE YA.
HEH HEH... ENJOY THE BLOOD 'N' GUTS! HE WOULD.
I'M GRATEFUL, FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART, I DON'T HAVE TO LISTEN TO YOU ALL THE WAY TO KAGA.
DON'T CREEP ME OUT.
WELL, NOW...

WHEW!

GLOK

DAMN IT!
YOU IDIOT!
HE DIDN'T SAY KILL HIM!
IT'S COOL, MAN! HE WON'T DIE.
IT WASN'T FATAL...
PROBABLY
WHAT WAS I SUP-POSED TO DO, HUH?!
YOU SAW IT! DUDE JUST STUCK HIS ARM BACK ON!
BESIDES, YOU SAW HIM FIGHT! HE COULD TAKE ALL THREE OF US!
YOU GOT ANY BETTER IDEAS? HUH?!

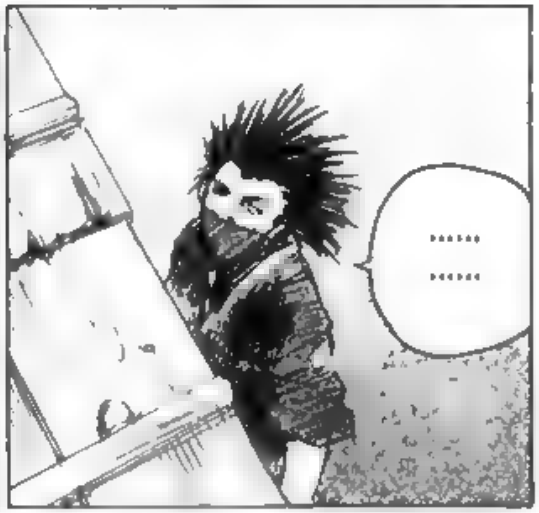

JUST RELAX, MAN. THE BOSS IS BAD NEWS, TOO.
SHIT... HE'LL PROBABLY LIKE IT IF THE GUY'S HALF-DEAD, YEAH?

HUH? AW, SHIT!
WHY, YOU...!!

GULP

QUICK! GIMME ANOTHER SWORD!
URG... ..... NUB!

AUGH! SHUKK CHOK GCHUK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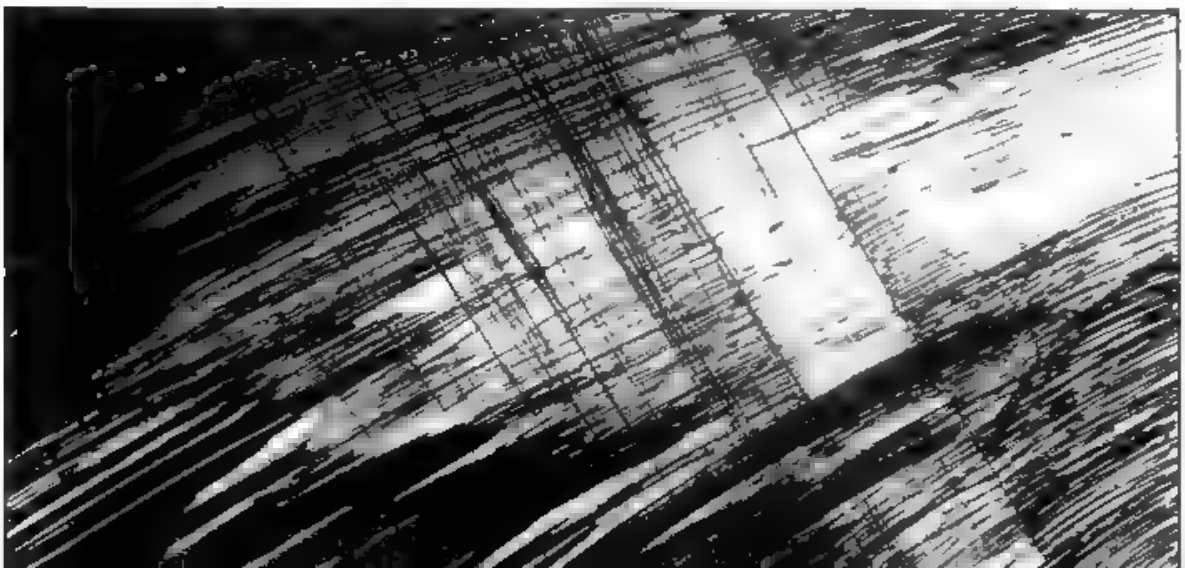


TIME TO DIE...!!
SLICE

AH?!
YOU AGAIN?!
MANJI! WHERE'S THAT GODDAMN MANJI?!
HE'S SICK OF YOUR UGLY MUG.
HE'S NOT COMING.

I TOLD YOU, ASSHOLE--
--YOU'RE FIGHTING ME. THIS IS MY DAY!

WELL...?
MASATSU... THAT'S YOUR NAME, RIGHT?

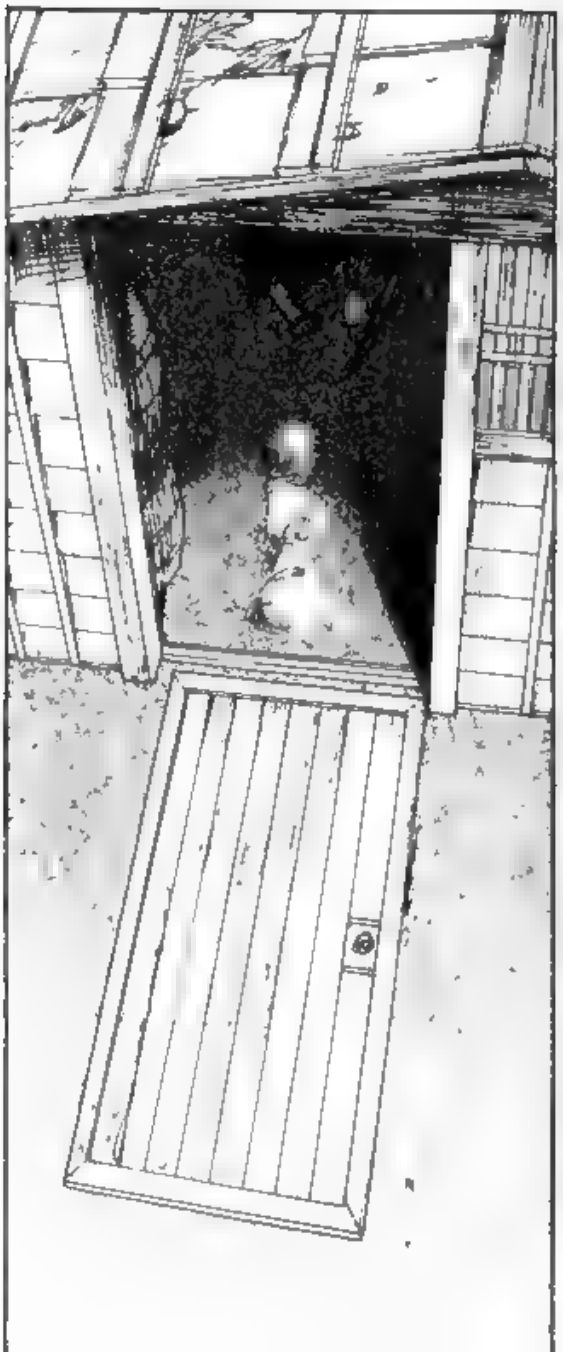
WEIRD SWORD. HOME-GROWN TECHNIQUE.
DON'T TELL ME... YOU'RE ITTŌ-RYŪ?

?
SO WHAT IF I AM?
HEY HEY HEY!
IS THIS FOR REAL? SINCE WHEN DID MANJI START WORKING FOR YOU GUYS?!
YOUR BOSS MAN'S IN DEEP SHIT IN KAGA. HE... .....
YOU DUMB SHIT-- YOU AIN'T GOT TIME FOR THIS PRIVATE REVENGE CRAP! YOU BETTER HURRY ON BACK!
HUH... MAYBE I SHOULDN'T'VE SAID THAT.
.....? .....

HEY!
WHAT'S GOING ON IN KAGA?! TELL ME!
HEH, HEH... NOT TOO CLASSY, BEGGING FOR HANDOUTS. RIGHT, PAL?
YOU WANT TO SEE "WHAT'S GOING ON IN KAGA"...?
GO FIND OUT FOR YOUR-SELF.
AND LET MANJI DEAL WITH ME. YEAH?
HRM... THOSE THREE STOOGES...
...THEY BETTER BE DOING THEIR DAMN JOB.

GUARD!

TH... THAT FUCKING HURT!
GUFF!
WHOO

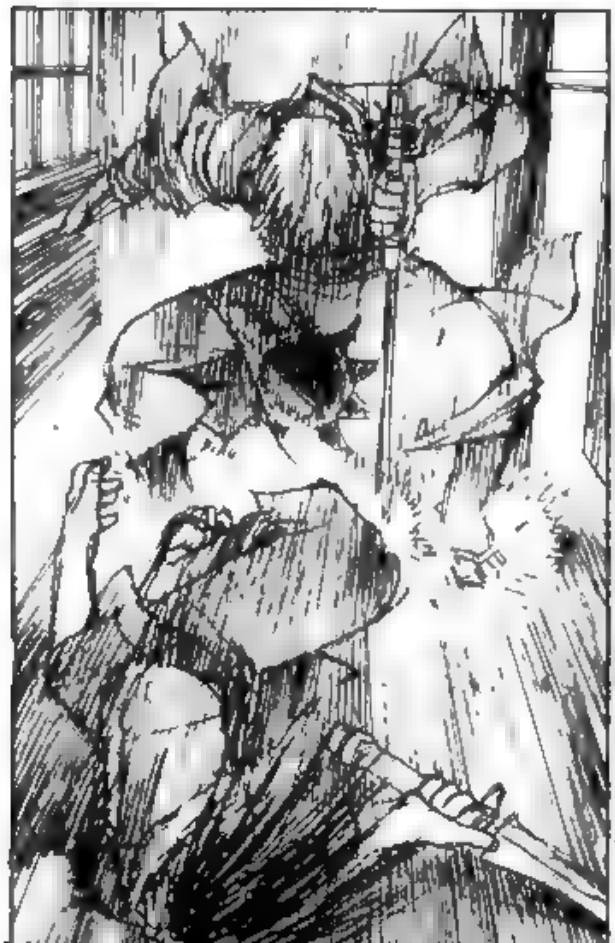


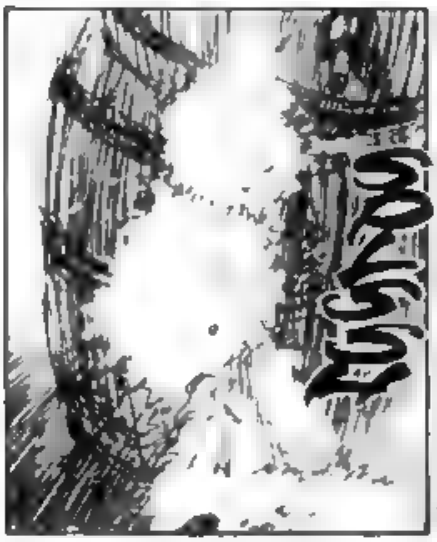
.....
.....
kofff

A LITTLE LIGHT FOR THIS KINDA WORK, AIN'T YA?
HEH HEH HEH HEH...

.....
HEH, HEH...
YOU KNOW... *HATING* OTHER PEOPLE...
...IT'S NOT HALF BAD.
IT'S REAL... HOW WOULD YOU SAY...?
SATISFY-INS. YEAH.
FOR SOME STREET PUNK WITH NOTHING ELSE...
...LIKE *ME*... IT'S ABOUT THE ONLY THING WORTH LIVING FOR.
AND I'M NOT LETTING SOME SNOT-NOSED *KID* GET IN MY WAY!

RRG...
.....!
THAT LITTLE KICK OF MINE OPEN UP YOUR WOUND...?
HUH?
WHAT'S THE PROB?
IS THAT YOUR EXCUSE FOR BEING SO FRIGGIN' LAME?!
!
DUMBASS. YOU GONNA GET HACKED, AND IT'S YOUR OWN DAMN FAULT.




KRACK

KA-CH

AH?!
SHIT!!

CHOO
SHNGG
TIME
TO
D--

KRAK
ドン

AUTUMN FROST
Part 4

WH-WHY WON'T HE CROAK?
HOLY SHIT... HE REALLY DOESN'T DIE! THIS ISN'T FUNNY, MAN.

HOW... HOW MANY TIMES DID WE *STAB* HIM?
TWO TIMES EACH... *SIX* PLACES!
YEOW!
DON'T RUN AWAY, YOU *DORKS!*
HEY!
C'MON-- WE STILL GOT A *CHANCE!*
THE *HELL* WE DO!
"SLOW HIM DOWN"...? GIVE ME A BREAK! HE'LL CHOP US TO *QUIVERING SHREDS!*
NO! WE REALLY *CAN* SLOW HIM DOWN, SEE?!
HUH? *ACT* LIKE WIMPS?
SURE, WE'D GET KILLED FIGHTING HIM STRAIGHT. WE'RE *WIMPS!* SO...LET'S *ACT* LIKE WIMPS.

ONE OF HIM, THREE OF US.
GET IT? HERE'S THE TRICK...
I GO AFTER HIS GUT AGAIN, WHILE YOU GUYS...
...WHACK OFF HIS LEGS! THAT'LL SLOW HIM DOWN, YEAH?
LOOK...
HE'S ONLY GOT ONE WEAPON. HE CAN'T BLOCK ALL OF US.
WE'LL GET ONE LEG AT LEAST.
ALL THREE OF US... TOGETHER!
OKAY... LINE UP! HERE WE GO...
SHAKK
SWORDS, READY!

RYAAAAH!
AW!
THUK
THUK
THUK
THUK
THUK

GRK!
WH... WHAT TH--?!
AW, SHIT!!
:kuff:
.....
HEY.

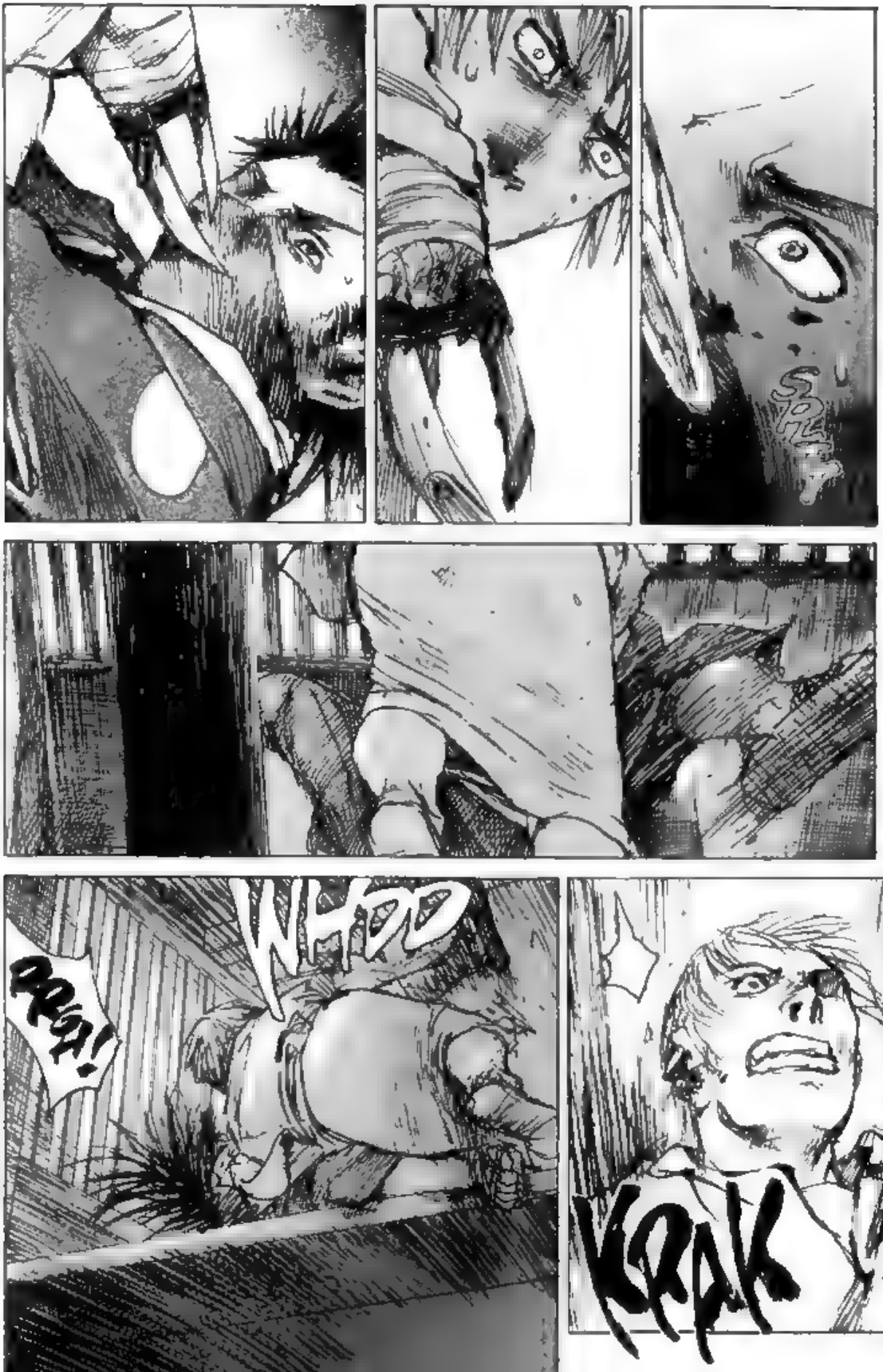
NOW THIS ONE HERE... CHECK IT OUT.
THE PERFECT SHAPE, DON'TCHA THINK...?
AND SNAP-PING 'EM LIKE TWIGS!
FOR SNAGGING ALL OF YOUR SWORDS.
UH... ER... .....?
FOR WHAT...?
HA, HA...
NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT...
LISTEN, GUYS. ME? LEMME TELL YA SOMETHING... I'M SICK OF PLAYING THIS SCENE.
THREE TIMES ON THE GOD DAMNED KŌSHŪ HIGHWAY.

"FIRST TIME, I HANG MY BUTT OUT TO DRY THREE DAYS.
"AND ALL I GET TO PLAY IS CLEAN-UP GUY AT A BLOOD-BATH.
"NEXT TIME, I HAVE TO FIGHT THREE HARD-ASS BASTARDS TO THE DEATH.
"MY ARMS AND LEGS HACKED OFF... AND NO TEGATA.
"AND TODAY... TODAY I GOTTA ASK SOME GREEN KID FOR HELP. AND JUST LOOK AT ME."
WHAT KINDA BULLSHIT KHARMA IS DUMPING ON ME LIKE THIS, OVER AND OVER?
I MEAN, COME ON!!
WELL, UH, I CAN'T REALLY--
SHADDUP!!
THAT'S IT. I'VE HAD ENOUGH. I'M NOT TAKING IT ANY MORE.
YOU JERKS ARE THE LAST STRAW!!

I'LL KILL YOU ALL!!

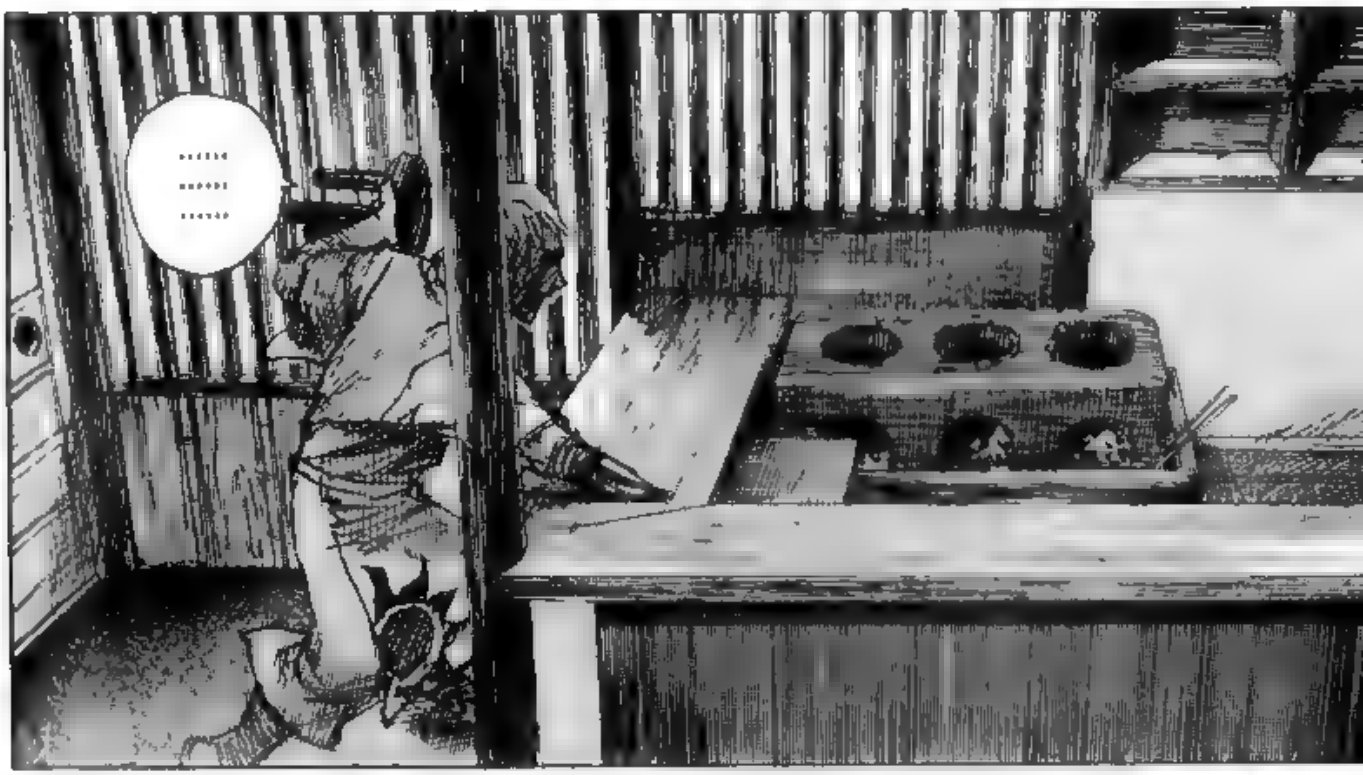
WE APOLOGIZE MOST HUMBLY, SIR!!
FOLKS GOTTA KNOW THEIR PLACE, GUYS.
SIR! YES, SIR!
YOU'RE WIMPS, SO AT LEAST ACT LIKE WIMPS!
ALL RIGHT, THEN. IF YOU GET THE PICTURE, PISS OFF.
YOUR BOSS AIN'T COMING BACK.

AH...?
THEN... WE CAN GO...?
YOU DUMB SHIT! NOT FOR FREE, BALDY!
??
SIR...?
WHEN HE HIRED YOU...
...SHIRA SAID HE PAID HALF UP FRONT. SO COUGH IT UP! ALL OF IT!!
.....
.....
POWER MAKES THE WORLD GO AROUND.
YEAH AND MONEY.
HEY, HEY! YOU THINK I'VE GOT SHIT FOR BRAINS? SHIRA TOLD ME HOW MUCH HE PAID YOU GUYS, SO DON'T PUSH YOUR LUCK, BUDDY!


SPIT
WHOO
AAAA!
KRAK

Nnk--
.....
AUGGH!
SON OF A BITCH, THAT HURT!!
TIRED OF PLAYING GAMES...
GOD-DAMN IT...

HYAA--
?!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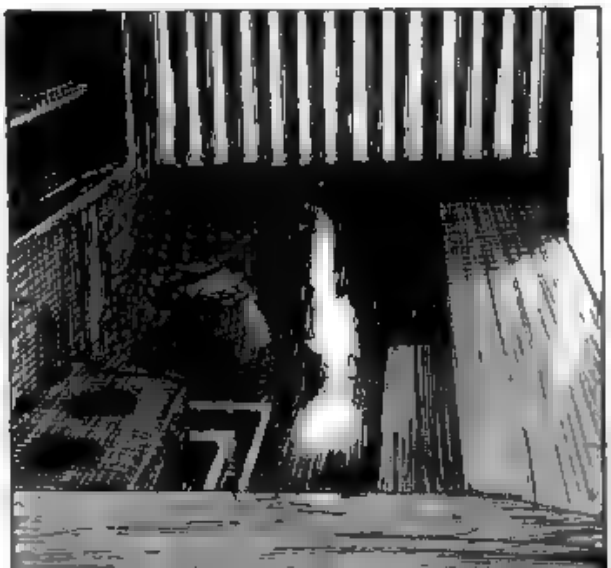
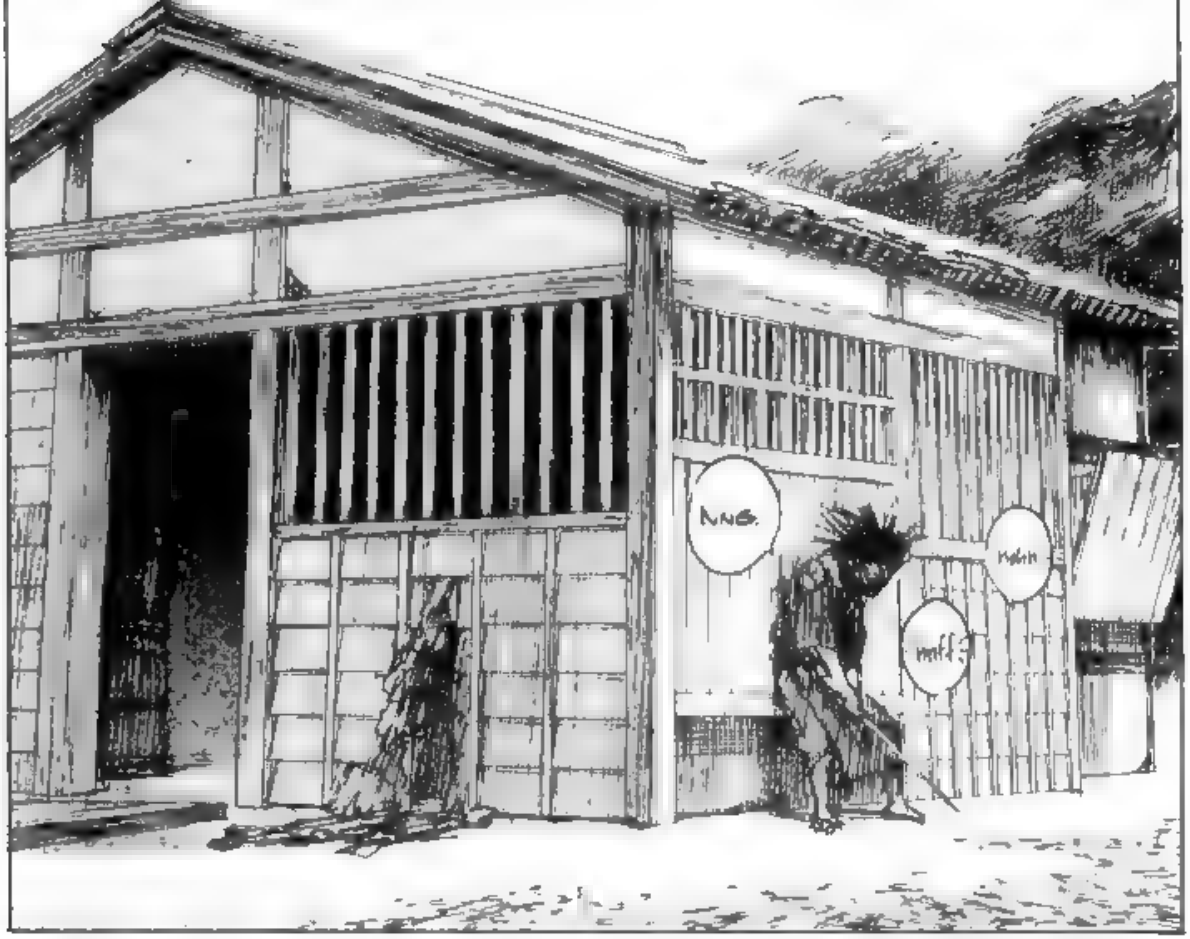
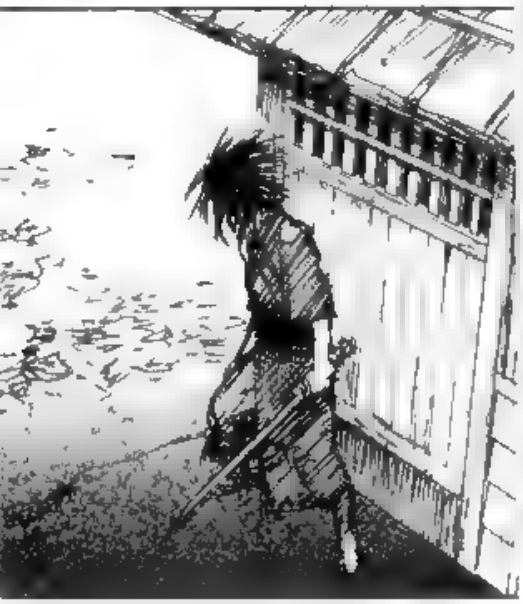



hng.
hhhh
nnf!



THOUGHT SO...
DOESN'T CHASE ME.

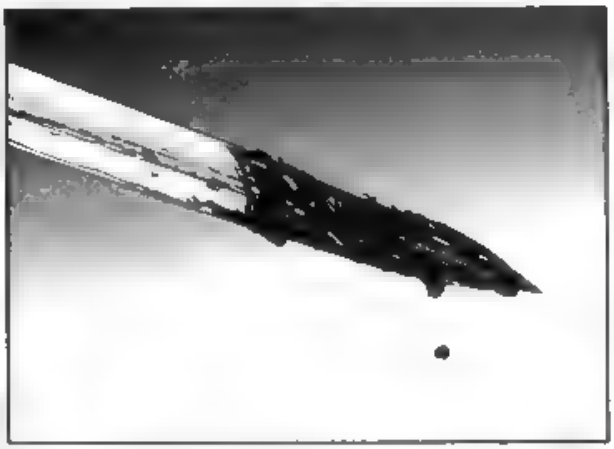
"HE'S STILL NOT USED TO IT.
"FIGHTING ONE-HANDED, I MEAN."

THE ENEMY'S NOT ALWAYS AS DUMB AS YOU THINK...
...MANJI, OLD BUDDY, OLD PAL.
HE DAMN WELL *NOTICED* HE'S GOT A PROBLEM...
...AND FIGURED OUT HE CAN'T FIGHT WELL IN THE FOREST.
I'M SMALLER. MAYBE I'LL HAVE AN EDGE.
WELL, SO BE IT.
IF IT'S THE HUT, IT'S THE *HUT*.
JUST YOU WAIT, SHIRA.
WE'LL SEE WHO LAUGHS LAST--

GCHUK
.....
.....?!
AHH...
?!
UGGK...
AAAH.
!

RRRGH...
!!
SHIN
GE!!

KRCCH

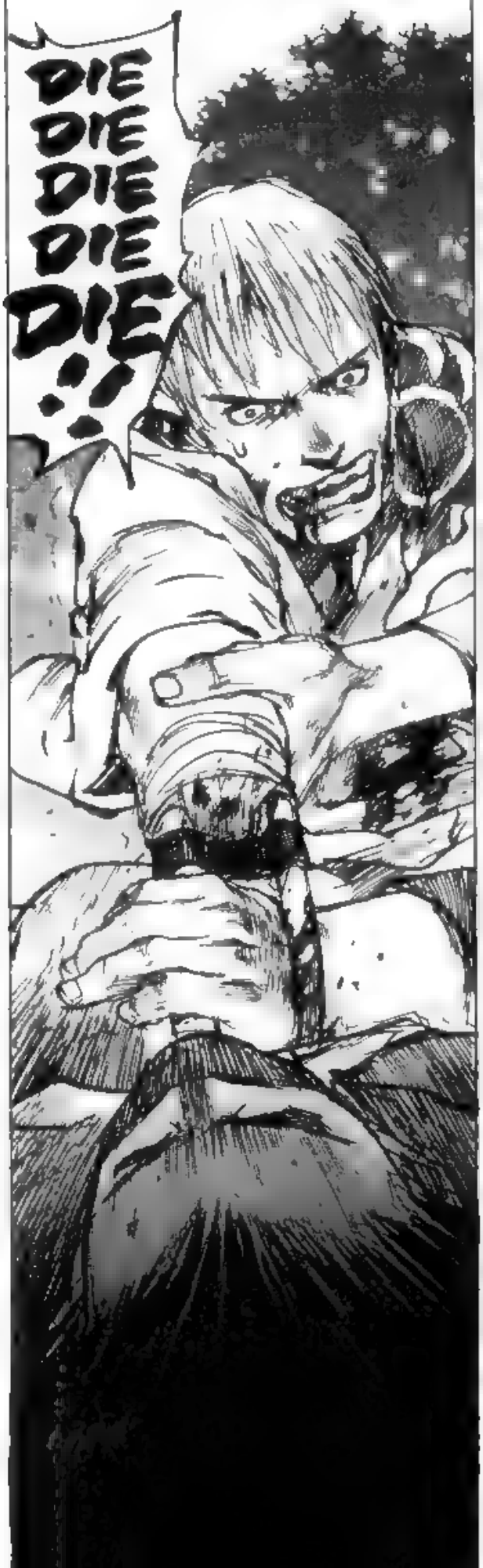


Y-YOU...
FRIGGIN'
PUNK...

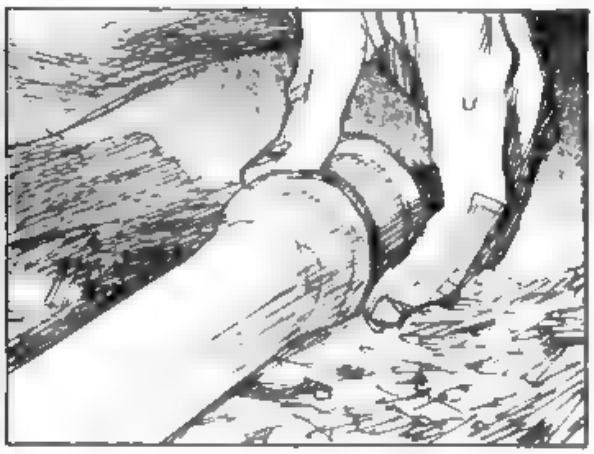
SHB
!
SHB
NNG..!

:hahn:
:hahn:
:huff:
:hahn:
mm

RUN!!
AUUGH!
YOU!
YOU LITTLE SHIT!!
CHUK


DIE
DIE
DIE
DIE
DIE!!

HKK...
.....
.....



SNIK
KCHOK

.....
.....
.....
.....
Inuhh
Inahh
HAH!

GUNSHOT!

YOU...
YOU...
IS THIS IT...?
THE SWORD THAT SLICED OPEN O-REN'S BREAST?
IT MUST HAVE BEEN SOFT... SO EASY TO CUT...
THE FLESH OF A YOUNG WOMAN...

AUTUMN FROST

Part 5

AAA--

.....
:koff:
:ughn:
:nnff:

:koff:
:koff:
Hulk!

Whuff
Gkkk...
:hough:
:koff:
RRGH!

HURT ME THIS BAD... YOU BASTARD...
KILLING YOU EASY... AIN'T GONNA HAPPEN.
MAGATSU... TAITO.
GET IT...?
.....
.....
D-DAMN...
G-GOOD JOB, PAL...
SHIT...

NAW... WAIT A SEC... THAT OUGHT TO BE...
"TAI-TAI," YEAH?
?!
=pteh=
.....
Y-YOU SCUM!
HEH! SCORED WITH THAT ONE, DIDN'T I?
??? YOU DIDN'T KNOW FOR SURE...?
NOT UNTIL NOW. SO...THAT WAS YOUR LITTLE SWEETIE.
TOO SKINNY, BUT AN OKAY PIECE OF ASS.

YOU'RE JUST SCREWING WITH ME.
A BASTARD LIKE YOU DOESN'T REMEMBER EVERYONE HE KILLS...
HEH'S TRUE ENOUGH. BUT...
...I REMEMBER THAT ONE.
LOOK! THANKS TO THAT SHITHEAD MANJI!
YOU THINK I BEEN HITTING ANY WHORE-HOUSES LATELY?
SO, YEAH, I REMEMBER.
THAT WAS THE LAST BITCH I EVER SCREWED.
I DID HER BEFORE I "DID" HER.
SPARE ME THE SHOCK, KID. SHE WAS A WHORE.
SPREADING HER LEGS WAS HER BUSINESS, YEAH? FOR ANY-BODY THAT HAD THE CASH...
GEH HAH HAH

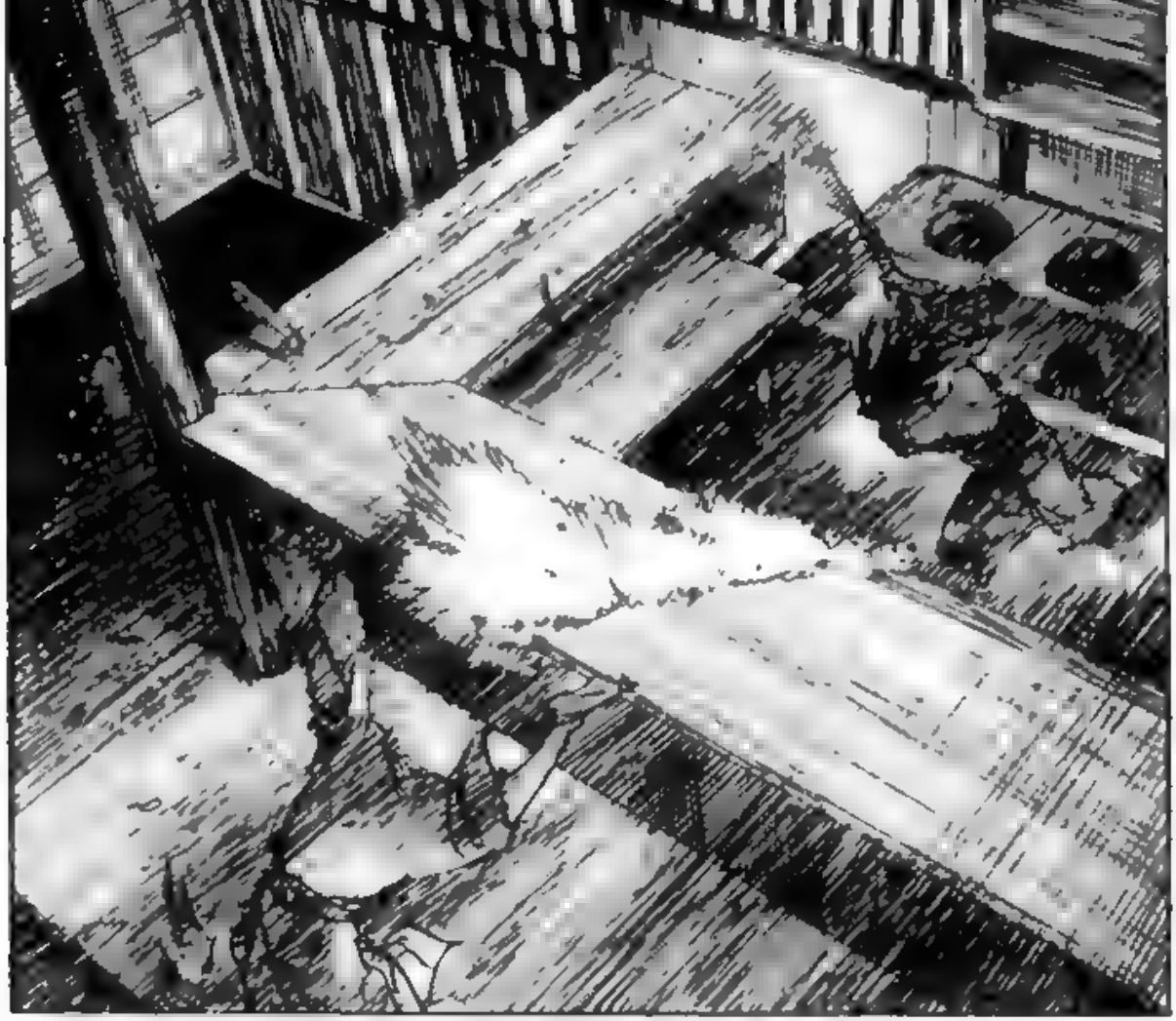
:koff:
HEY, KID...
WANNA HEAR A COOL TRICK?
.....
NOT FROM YOU.
NORMALLY, I AIN'T INTERESTED IN SCREWING, SEE? TOO BORING.
BUT... HEH HEH HEH
LEMME TELL YA A SECRET.
GET INSIDE 'EM...
...THEN START CUTTING THEM UP!

GET IT...? WHEN YA CUT BITCHES WHERE IT *HURTS*...
...FIRST THE MUSCLES GO *LIMP*... AND THEN THEY *ALL* TIGHTEN UP.
THOSE MUSCLES TOO, KIDDO. HEH HEH HEH... THINK ABOUT IT...*YOU'RE* A GUY.
THERE'S NOTHING *LIKE* IT, MAN!
...*YOUR* GIRL? SHE WAS ONLY NUMBER *FIVE* ON THE HIT PARADE.
NOW, HEY... I AIN'T NO *SERIAL KILLER.*
I DON'T DO IT THAT WAY *EVERY* TIME... SO...
THAT'S WHY I REMEMBER HER!
GYAH HAH HAH!

THAP
WHOA...!
GLOK

HEY, MAN...
...I WASN'T FINISHED TELL--.
GWAA!
-ngkk-
-nff-
NNG...
NNG!
HE'S LOST IT...
WELL, SWT.

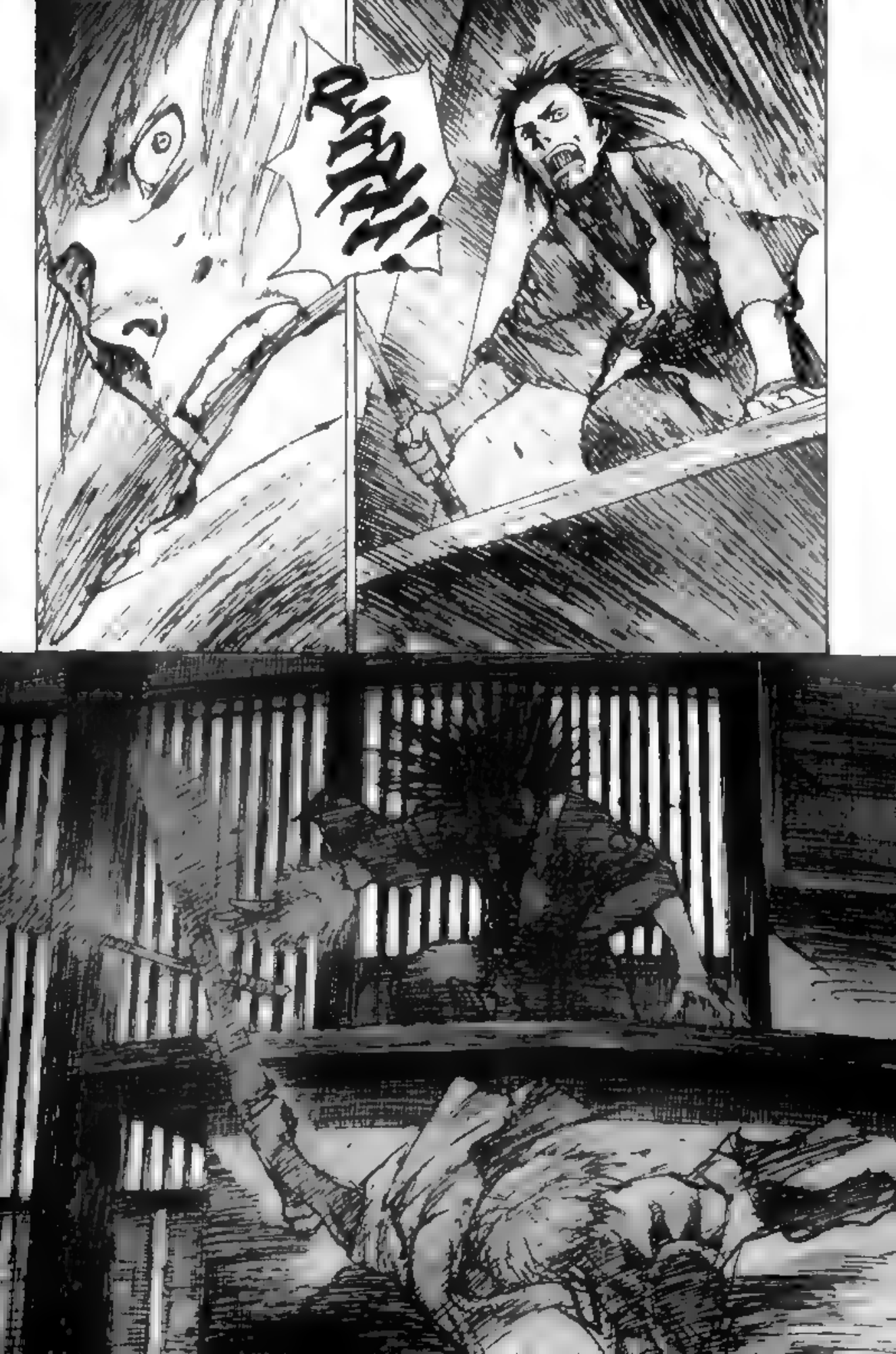
SKREAK
OH NO YOU DON'T!!
HOLY CRAP...!
WHEEE
KRAK
HUH!
:koff:
YAAH!



!

FWAP

NNGN...
!

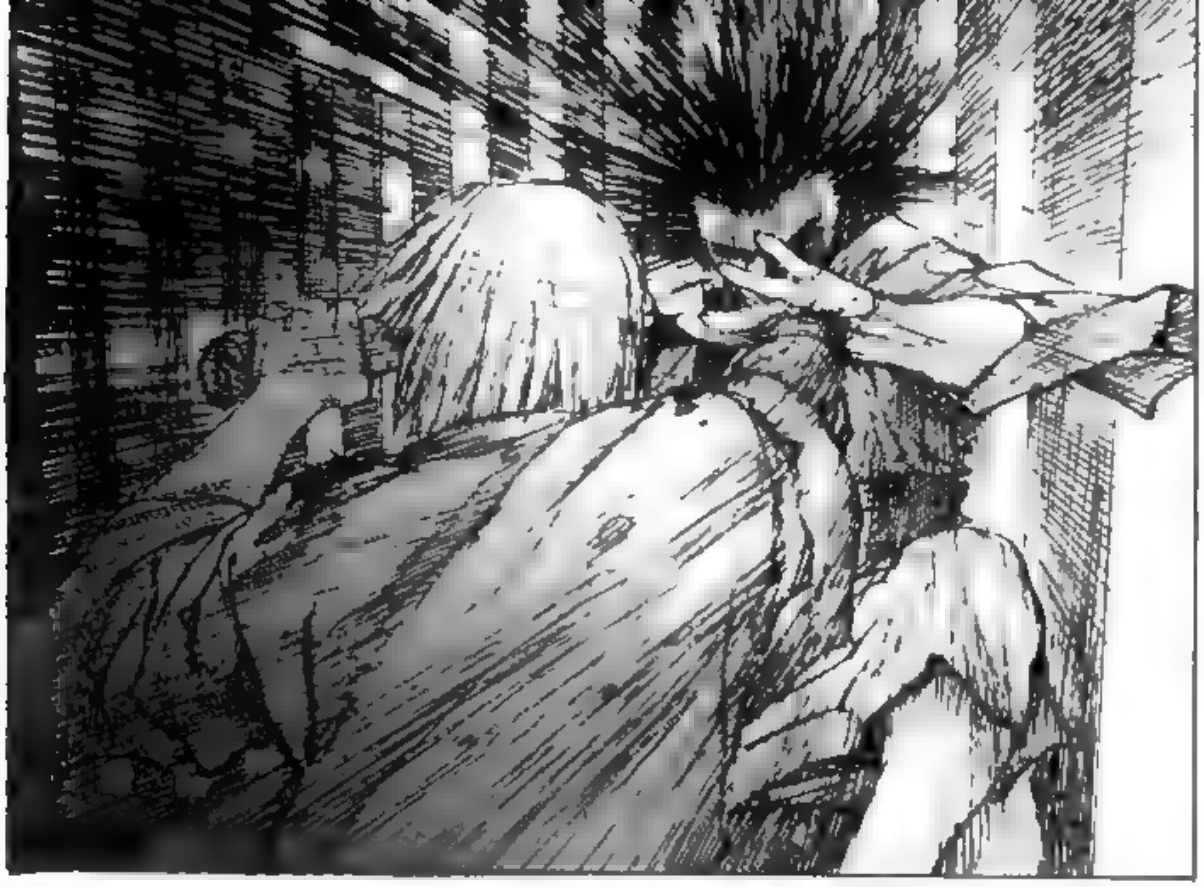


ハイーEEEE!!

NGK...
.....

.....
.....
HA...
HA HA...
GAME OVER! AND THANKS, MAGATSU TAITO!

NO, REALLY! I *OWE YOU*, BUDDY!
FORGETTING YOU LEFT *THIS THING* LYING AROUND... *GOOD ONE*, KID!
.....
.....
UNNG...
AWW, DON'T LOOK SO *SAD*.
YOU'RE GONNA MEET YOUR LITTLE CUTIE, YEAH?
I'M *SUCH* A BAD GUY... TWO LI'L LOVE-BIRDS...
SHOULDN'T HAVE TORN YOU APART.
BUT THAT'S OVER *NOW!*



AUGH!!

SO COME ON... JUST SHUT UP AND DIE, WHY DON'T--
SHIRA!

SHIT
THAT AGAIN?!

SO WHAT NEXT, DUMBASS? WHATCHA GONNA DO NOW?!
NO WEAPON! BOTH ARMS HACKED! THERE AIN'T NO "NEXT!"

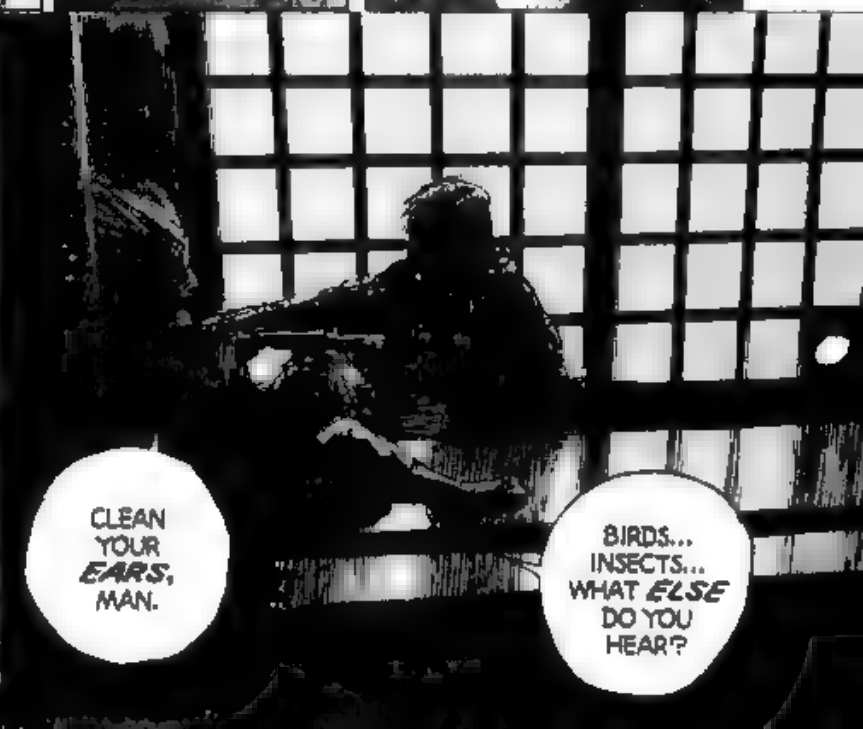
SHIRA... TELL ME... WHERE WERE YOU BORN?
LOOK... IT HURTS, ALL RIGHT. AND I'M SCREWED, JUST LIKE YOU SAID.
...I'D LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE GUY WHO KILLED ME.
HEH... BUT JUST FOR LAUGHS IN THE NEXT WORLD...
HEH HEH HEH...
...? HAH...!
NO CRYING LIKE A PUSSY. I LIKE THAT.
SO, CAME TO TERMS WITH IT, DID YA?

ME, I'M NOT SOME COUNTRY BOY LIKE YOU.
BORN IN THE *HEART* OF EDO, MAN. NAGAHAMA, IN NIHON-BASHI.
HEH... ..... NO KIDDING.
THEN, IN THIS BATTLE, THE "COUNTRY BOY" HELD THE HIGH GROUND...
...RIGHT FROM THE START!
HEH, HEH...
WE'RE SO OUT OF BREATH...
...CAN'T HARDLY FEEL IT NOW.

BUT DID YOU *NOTICE?* WHEN WE WERE OUT IN FRONT OF THE HUT?
THE AIR AROUND HERE'S A BIT... *COOLER* THAN THE HIGHWAY.

HUH... ?!
WHAT *SHIT* ARE YOU TALKING *NOW*, ASSHOLE?

HEH... GUESS YOU DIDN'T.
THEN I'LL HELP YOU OUT.


CLEAN YOUR *EARS*, MAN.
BIRDS... INSECTS... WHAT *ELSE* DO YOU HEAR?

PHWEEET
SKREEEE
CHIK CHIKKA
SKSSSHH
SKSSSSHHH
CHIRK CHIRK

SKSSHH

SEE...
SHIRA...

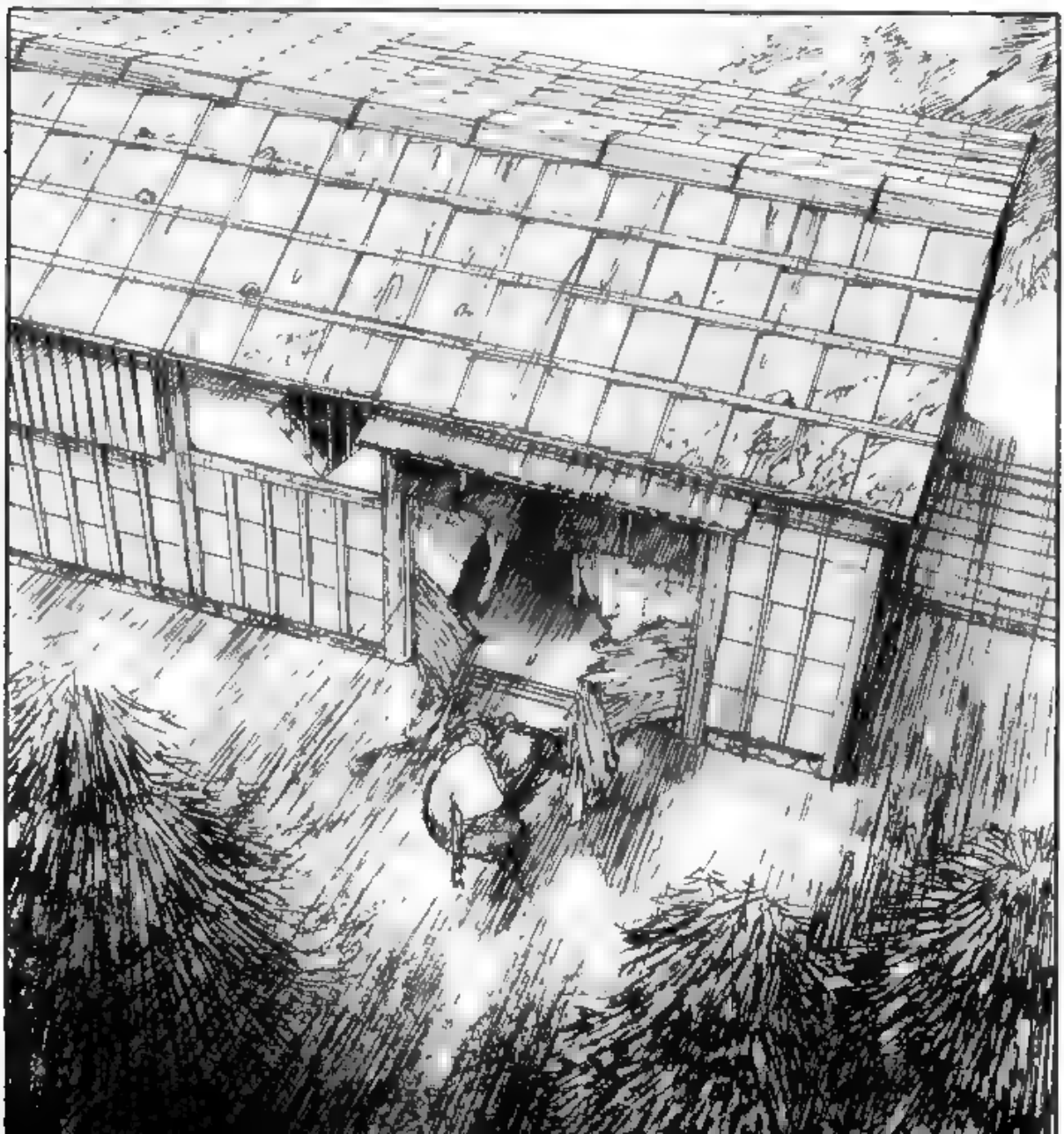
YOU DON'T ALWAYS NEED A SWORD TO KILL SOMEONE.
YOU CAN DO IT LIKE... THIS!

SKLCH
?!

WHA--
NNG!

GLCH

!?
NNGF



WHAT THE F--?!
HEY!
YOU THINK YOU'RE KAMUI OR SOMETHING?!
LEMME GO!
DAMN!
CHUNK
NNG!

YOU THINK YOU GOT AN EDGE ON ME OUT HERE?
GRAB A BRAIN! NOT WHEN YOU'RE ALL HACKED UP, YOU IDIOT!
BUHA HAHA!
HEY, THANKS FOR THE RIDE, BUDDY!
PUT ME DOWN WHEREVER... I'LL JUST KILL YOU THERE!
!!
SKKSSKKRRWWWBBBB

RMMBBB
RMBBB
AH!!
NOO!
.....
.....
....?!
TWIP
SNAK

GUGGH!
RWWWB.B

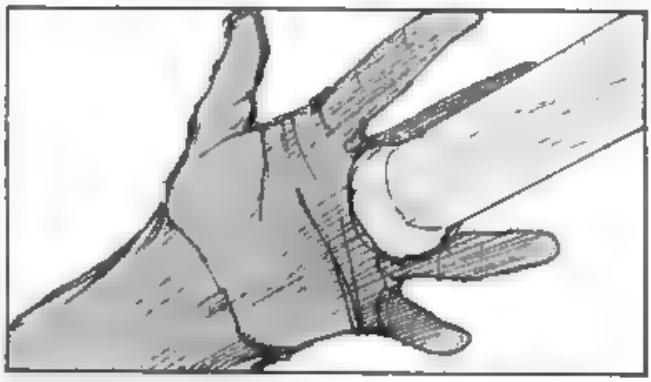
AUTUMN FROST
Part 6

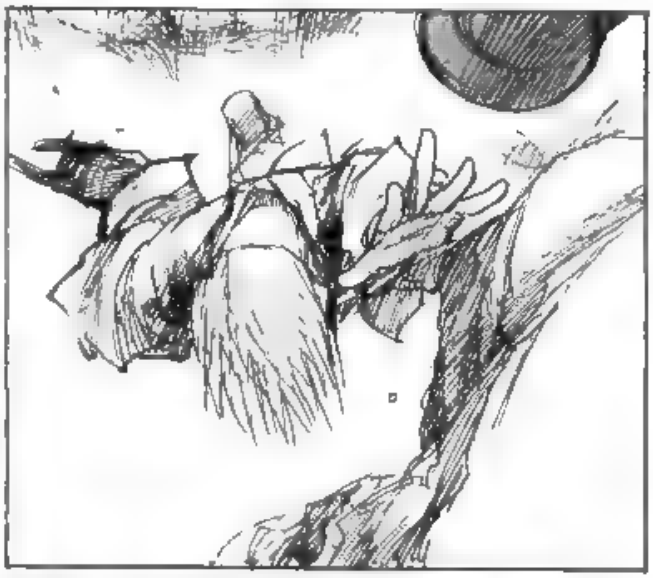
AAA...

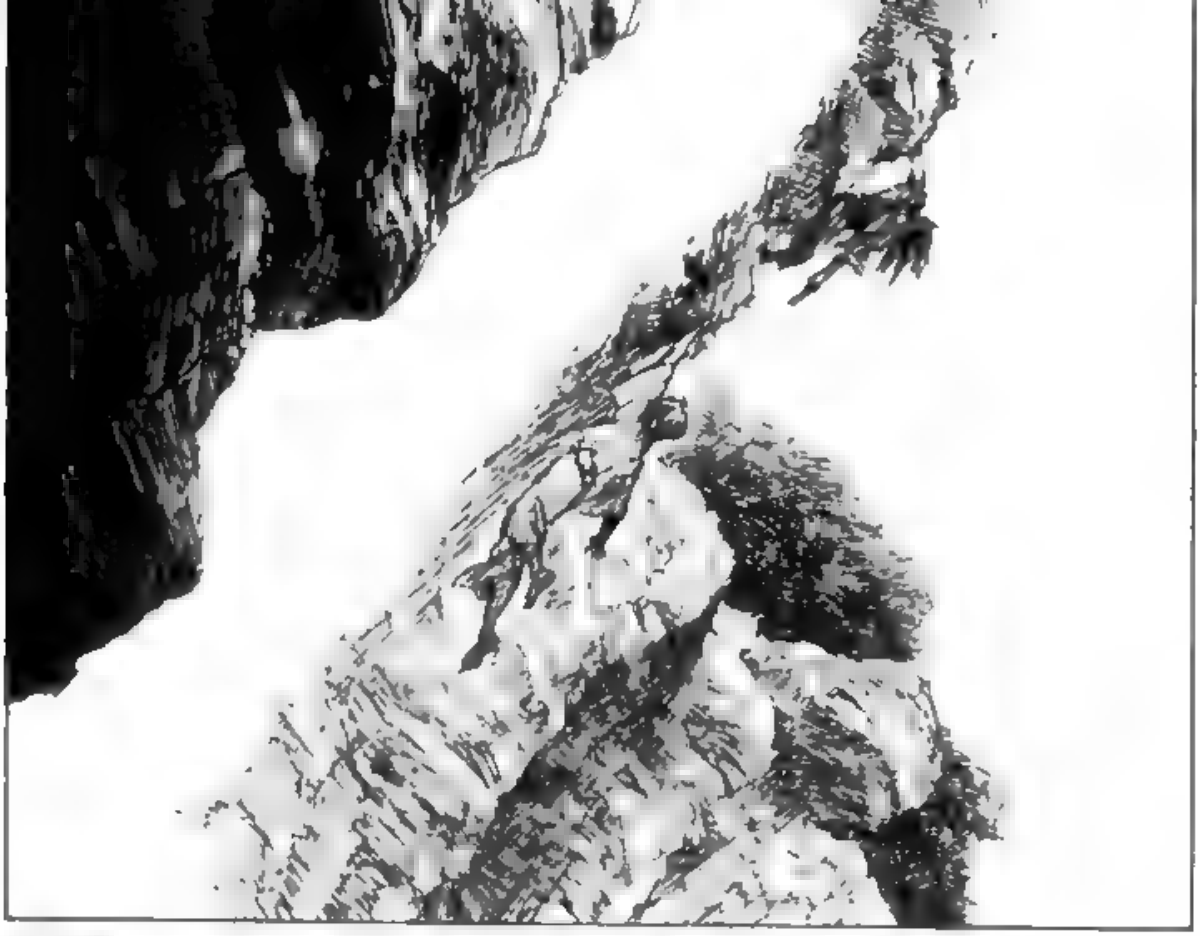
?!

GGG

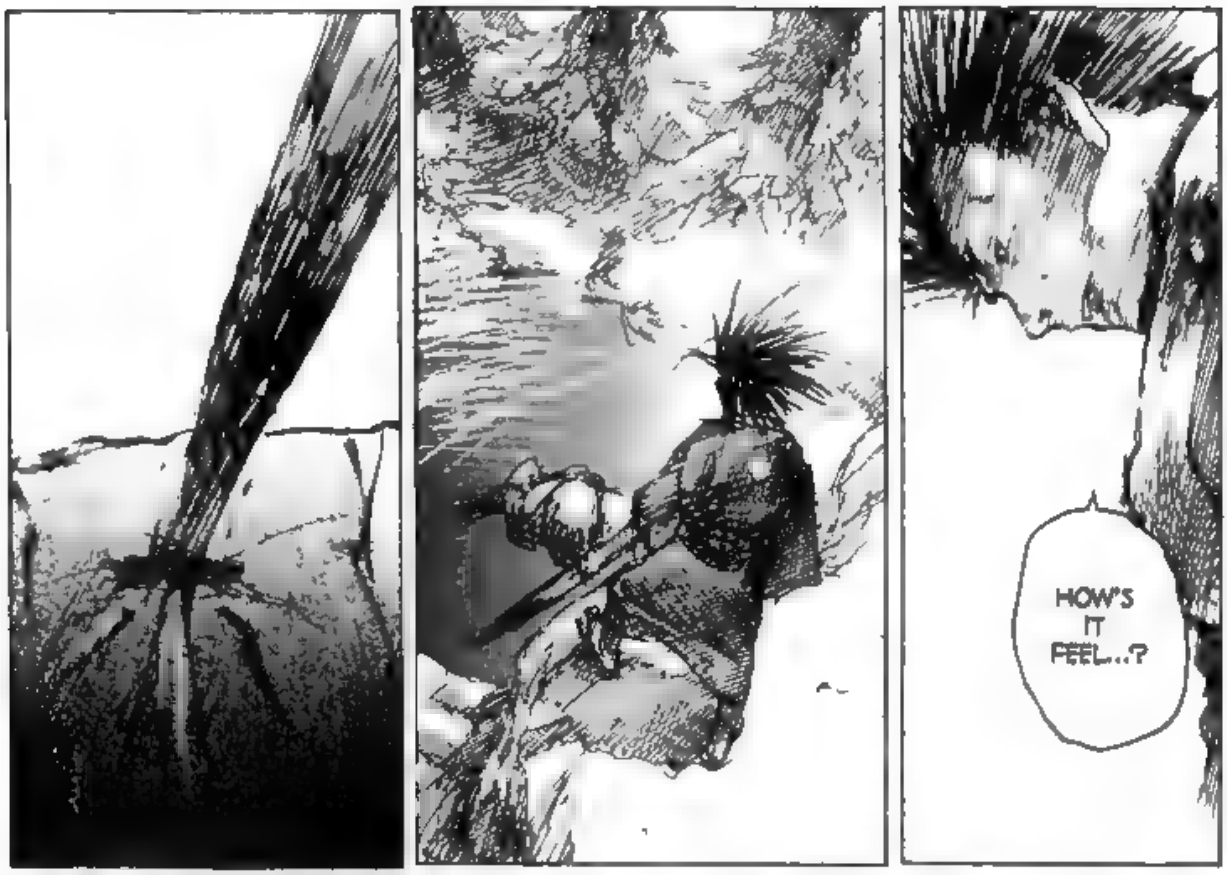
HRGG...
!?







GOOD MOVE.


HOW'S IT FEEL..?

NOTHING YOU CAN DO!
YOUR LIFE IN SOMEONE ELSE'S HANDS! WELL?! HOW DO YOU LIKE IT?!

HEH... IF YOU'RE A REAL BAD GUY, ACT LIKE ONE.
COME ON. BEG FOR MERCY.

SCREAM FOR IT! LET O-REN HEAR YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE!

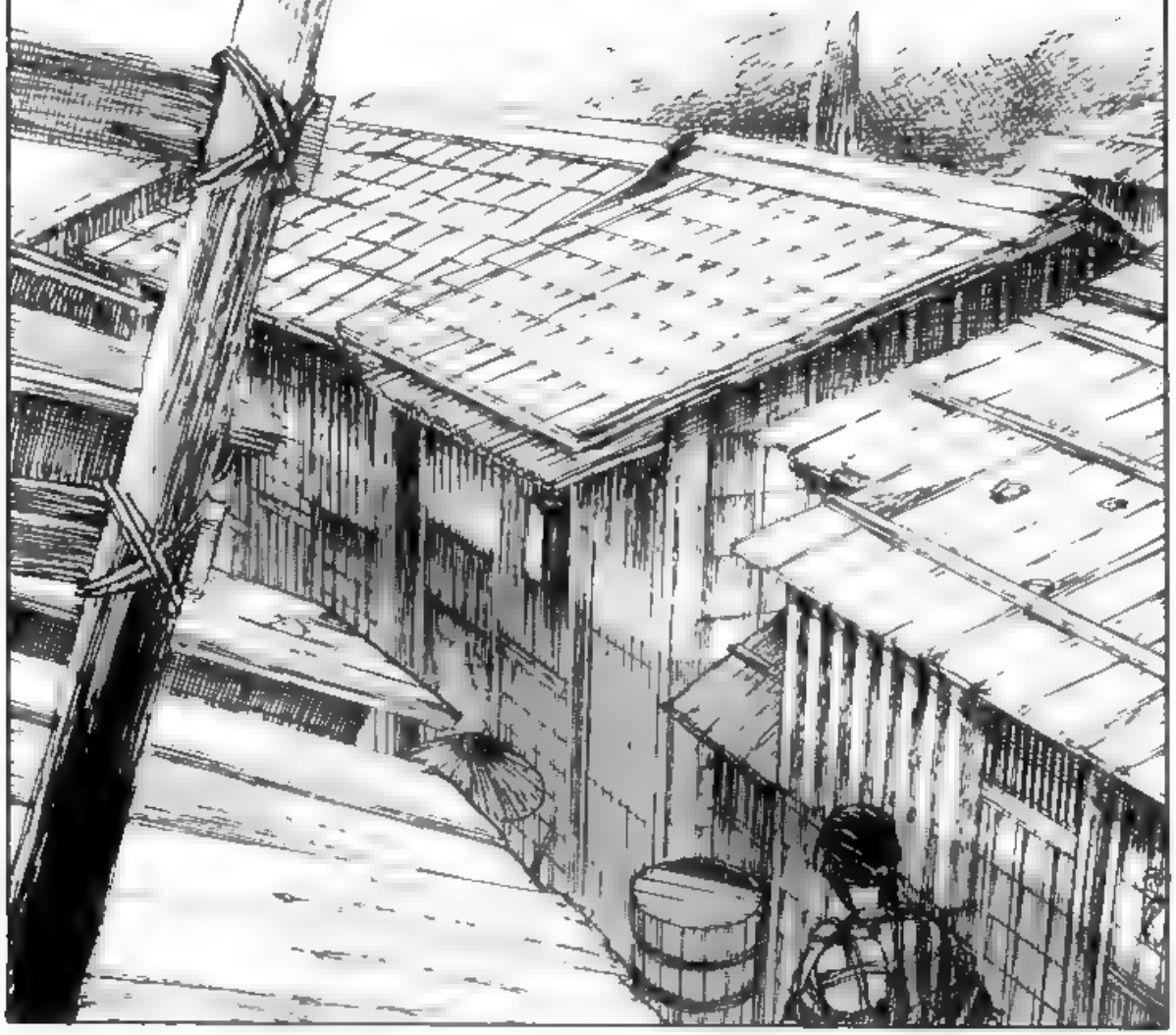
GUESS WHAT, ASSHOLE? I WON'T BEG. AND I WON'T LET GO.
REAL "BAD GUYS" NEVER GIVE UP, YOU DUMBASS!
"ACCEPTING YOUR FATE"... WHAT BULLSHIT!
THAT'S LIKE ADMITTING YOU LOST!
SO DON'T GIVE ME THAT CRAP!
ME?! GIVE UP FOR A PUNK LIKE YOU?!

NO FRIGGIN' WAY, MAN! I'M GOING DOWN FIGHTING!
KICK AND YELL AND SCREAM UNTIL I WIN. THAT'S HOW I LIKE IT!
BET YOU'D BE TOO PROUD TO DO THAT, WOULDN'T YOU?
EH?! ITTŌ-RYŪ DUDE?
GO ON... CHOP IT!

RIGHT NOW I JUST DON'T GOT THE STRENGTH TO PULL MYSELF UP ONE-HANDED.
PISSES ME OFF... BUT...
BUT AS LONG AS I'VE GOT MY HAND... EVEN IF I FALL, MAN...
...I'LL CRAWL BACK UP AND TAKE YOUR HEAD!
SCARY, HUH? HUH?!
IF YOU'RE SCARED, CUT IT OFF!
I CAN'T STOP YOU NOW!

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
HEH, HEH
MANJI GETS MY RIGHT HAND! YOU GET MY LEFT! DOUBLE THE HATE, MAN!
GYAH HAH HAH HAH HAH!

FILLS ME WITH JOY, MAN! PURE FRIGGIN' JOY!!
BWA HA HA HA HA...!
TWO GUYS I HATE ENOUGH TO BUTCHER!
DAMN... NEVER FELT THAT BEFORE! SO HOW DOES IT FEEL...?
GYEH HEH HEH..



OUCH!
HOLY SHIT!
WHAT ARE YOU PUTTING ON ME, DOC?!
I SAID DON'T MOVE, YOUNG'N!
HAW HAW HAW HAW!

HE'S A LUCKY FELLER. POKED FULL OF HOLES, AND NOT A' ONE OF THEM FATAL.
YOU KNOW, MAGATSU... IN THE GOOD OLD DAYS, BUSHI WERE ASHAMED TO GET THAT CHOPPED UP...
WHAT?! LOOK WHO'S TALKING !!
YOU CALL THAT BLOODY RAG A KIMONO, MANJI?!
SO, ANYWAY... WHY SO GLUM?
YOU NAILED YOUR LADY'S KILLER... RIGHT?
YEAH...
IT'S NOTHING. ONLY...
MAYBE THAT BASTARD WAS RIGHT. MAYBE O-REN WOULD HAVE BEEN HAPPIER IF I DIED AND WENT TO HER SIDE.

WELL, WHATEVER. IN ANY CASE...
...IT'S THE END OF THE ROAD FOR ONE *CREEPY* DUDE, ANYWAY.
I SURE DIDN'T EXPECT THOSE THREE STOOGES.
SLOWED ME DOWN, BUT AT LEAST I DIDN'T HAVE TO DEAL WITH SHIRA. THANKS, KID.
SPEAKING OF WHICH, MANJI...
CHANGE OF *PLANS*. AS SOON AS THESE WOUNDS CLOSE...
...I'M HEADING FOR *KAGA*.

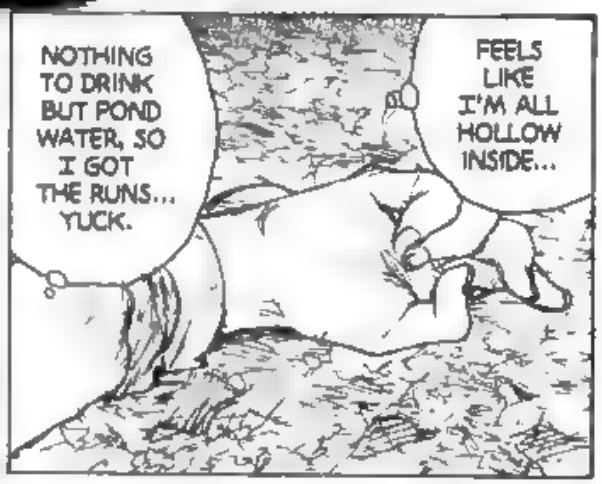
SHIRA LET SLIP SOMETHING ABOUT THE BOSS.
SO I GOTTA CHECK IT OUT. HE MAY NEED--
"BOSS," IS IT? THAT'S FUNNY.
THOUGHT YOU SAID YOU QUIT THE ITTŌ-RYŪ.
.....
.....
YOU'RE RIGHT.
I DID.
I QUIT, ALL RIGHT. BUT...
AS A HUMAN BEING, I HAVE TO--
BWA HAWHAW!
GIMME A BREAK! "HUMAN BEING"...?!
MANJI...
ONE OF THESE DAYS, I'M GOING TO WRAP MY FINGERS AROUND YOUR MISERABLE THROAT AND STRANGLE YOU!
FINE. LAUGH ALL YOU WANT.
BUT IF YOU AND I MEET AGAIN, IN KAGA MAYBE, AND ANOTSU'S THERE...?

I'LL PROBABLY SIDE WITH HIM.
SO JUST REMEMBER THAT, OKAY?
GOODBYE PRESENT.
AND BODY-GUARD FEE.

WITH SIX RYŌ, YOU CAN COVER THE DOCTOR, FOOD... WHATEVER YOU NEED, LONG AS YOU WANT.
PATCH UP THAT BOD OF YOURS, KID. GO FIND YOUR FRIEND.
MANJI... YOU'RE A GOOD GUY.
NAW... I JUST SHOOK DOWN THE THREE STOOGES WHILE YOU WERE AFTER SHIRA.
WHAT?! YOU WERE SCORING! WHILE I WAS FIGHTING FOR MY LIFE?!
HEY, I GAVE YOU HALF, DIDN'T I?
GODDAMN SNOT-NOSED PUNK!! THIS CASH DIDN'T JUST FALL INTO MY HANDS, YOU KNOW!
BUT THANKS TO THAT, KAGA JUST GOT A WHOLE LOT CLOSER.
GOD KNOWS HOW LONG IT'D TAKE TO TRUDGE THERE. BUT WITH THIS...
I CAN HIRE A PALANQUIN, SO...FOUR DAYS MAX.

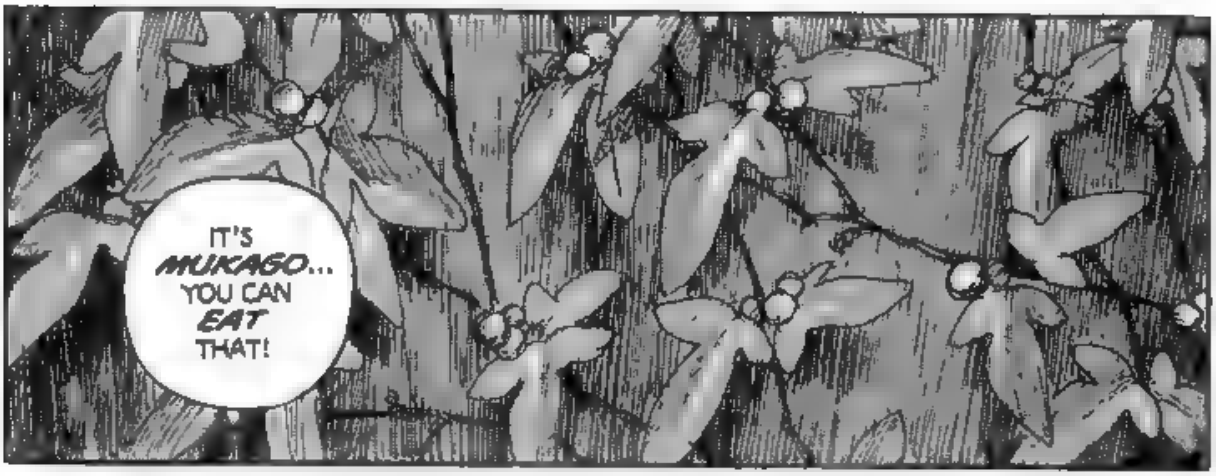
JUST DON'T CROAK BEFORE I GET THERE, RIN!

THREE...?
FOUR...?
HOW MANY DAYS SINCE I ATE...?


NOTHING TO DRINK BUT POND WATER, SO I GOT THE RUNS... YUCK.
FEELS LIKE I'M ALL HOLLOW INSIDE...

AND WHERE *AM* I? I THINK I'M LOST...
AM I EVEN HEADED TOWARDS KAGA ANY MORE...?

AH?!


IT'S
MUKAGO...
YOU CAN
EAT
THAT!

NNGG...
.....
.....
UHGG!
SNICK
-hahh-
-hff-
-hahhh-

Grrff
.....
.....
M-MANJI...

THE WIND AND THE HERON

THANK YOU SO MUCH.
HERE... FIXED.

HOW IS THE FIT? OKAY?
YES... MUCH BETTER THAN BEFORE THE STRAP BROKE.

WEB
OH...!

IT WASN'T THIS BAD WHEN WE CAME DOWN THIS STREET BEFORE.
IT MUST BE MORE CROWDED IN THE AFTER-NOON.

IT'S THE MOST POPULAR OF THE THREE TEA HOUSE DISTRICTS IN KANA-ZAWA.
I'VE SEEN BOYS FROM THE DOJO DOWN HERE SOMETIMES. HA, HA...IF MY STEPFATHER KNEW, HE'D BURST A BLOOD VESSEL.
THIS IS A "TEA HOUSE" DISTRICT. IT'S CALLED HIGASHI.
IT'LL GET EVEN WORSE LATER.
YOU'VE BEEN WALKING TOO LONG IN THIS CROWD.
LET'S START BACK, HISOKA.
PLEASE WAIT HERE. I'LL GET A PALAN-QUIN.
B-BUT... ACTUALLY, I'M STILL...
I... I'M SORRY... ......

DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN WE FIRST MET, ANOTSU-DONO? HERE AT THIS SPOT?
YES. I REMEMBER IT VERY WELL INDEED.
I THOUGHT...
I FELT SOMEBODY NEARBY, AND DUCKED INTO THE WOODS. THAT WALL OF DARK, DARK GREEN... ALMOST BLACK. AND WHEN IT OPENED IN FRONT OF ME...
...THERE YOU WERE, ON THAT ROCK, BATHED IN LIGHT. LIKE SOMETHING FROM ANOTHER WORLD.
I THOUGHT YOU WERE...

A HERON, PERHAPS...
MMM...? A HERON?! HA HA!
DOES THE SPRING WATER HELP YOUR EYES?
NO. BUT MY STEP-FATHER SAYS TO DO IT.
SO... ....

I KNOW IT'S JUST BALM FOR MY SOUL.
THE MEDICINES I HAVE TO TAKE TO LIVE ARE STEALING MY VISION, DAY BY DAY. WASHING MY EYES CAN'T BRING IT BACK.

BUT YOU WERE ALL ALONE THAT DAY.
ISN'T THAT DANGEROUS? WHAT IF SOMETHING HAPPENED...?

OH, I TRY NOT TO LET IT AFFECT MY DAILY LIFE... NOT OFTEN.
FOR EXAMPLE, I CAN HANDLE STAIRS WITHOUT HELP, BOTH UP AND DOWN.

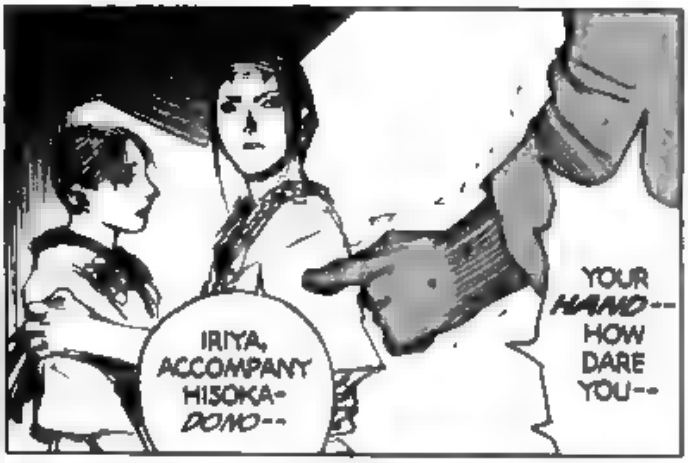
AND SINCE I'VE KNOWN MY STEPFATHER AND HIS STUDENTS SO LONG...
...I CAN TELL THEM ALL APART. THEIR SILHOUETTES, MAYBE? OR JUST, THEIR *FEEL*.

AND YET...
WHEN I MET YOU WITH KENSUI-*DONO*, YOU KNEW IT WAS I WHO MET YOU HERE.
YES, WELL... THAT WAS AN UNUSUAL SITUATION.

IT WAS BECAUSE YOU WEAR SUCH A STRIKING, BEAUTIFULLY DYED KIMONO.
THAT'S HOW I REMEMBERED.
IF I WAS A HERON... THEN YOU...
...YOU WERE LIKE A GUST OF WIND, STIRRING THE TREES.
BEARING THIS HERON TO THE SKY...

AH?
SIR! PERFECT TIMING.
!!
A MESSAGE, SIR. FROM ABAYAMA-DONO.
WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?
BARO...?

HISOKA-DONO... YOU GO ON AHEAD.
ALL RIGHT.


IRIYA, ACCOMPANY HISOKA-DONO--
YOUR HAND-- HOW DARE YOU--

PLEASE, IRIYA-SAN. LET'S GO.
B-BUT... MA'AM!! HE... HE...

.....
.....!

IRIYA...? CAN YOU STOP FOR A MOMENT?
Y- YES, MA'AM!
AH?! M- MA'AM...?

IT HASN'T GONE DOWN EVEN YET...?
SUCH TERRIBLE SWELLING...
HUH?!
OH! UH, THAT...
I HEARD KENSUI DISCIPLINED ALL OF YOU AFTER-WARDS.
I'M SO SORRY.
HE'S EVEN HARSHER THAN MY FATHER.
FORGET IT! IT'S N-NOTHING!
C-CAN'T CALL MYSELF A S-SAMURAI IF THIS BOTHERS ME, RIGHT?
BUT MAYBE IT'LL TEACH YOU...
...NOT TO BE SO RASH NEXT TIME. PERHAPS?
Y... YES, MA'AM.
THIS IS FAR ENOUGH. THANK YOU.
AH... OKAY!

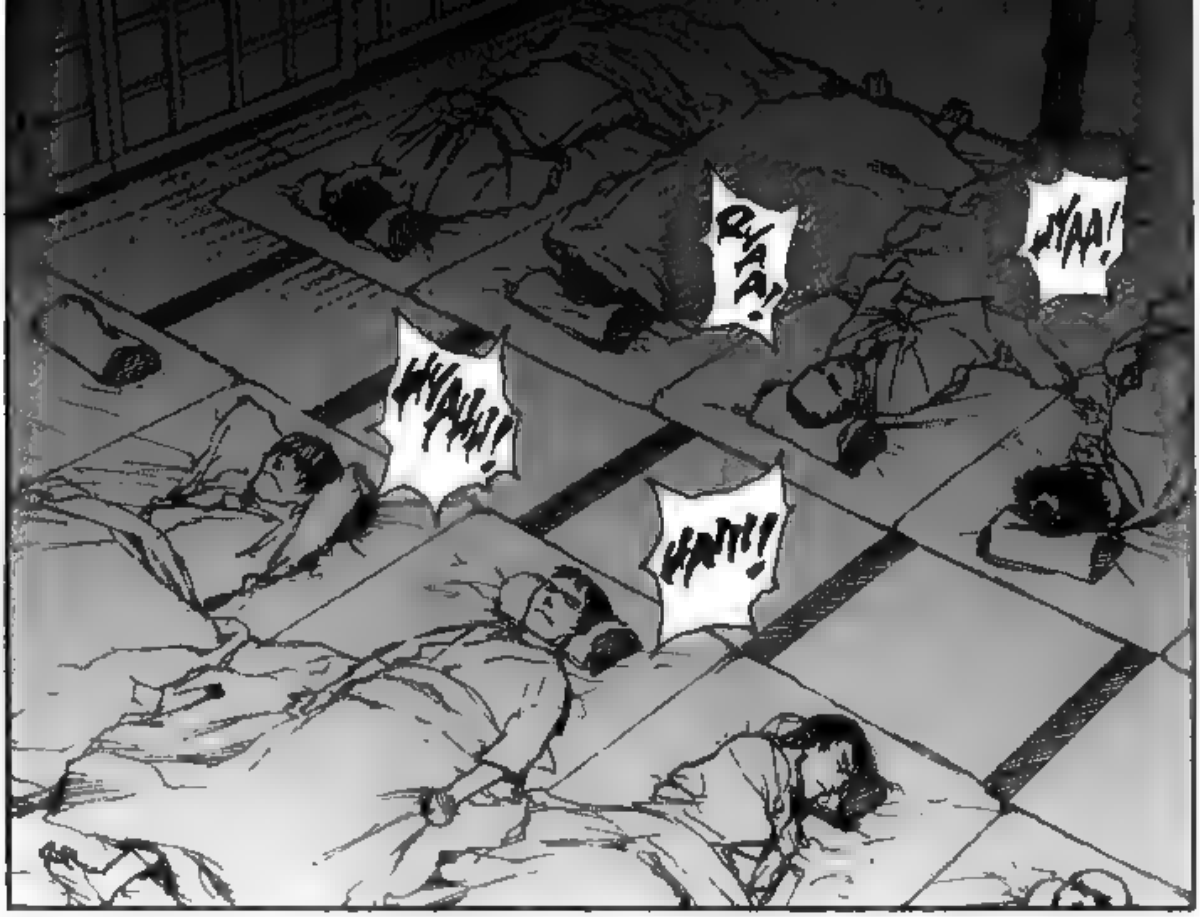
SEE YOU TOMORROW.
HA HA!
GEEZ, IRIYA! YOU PSYCHO!
koff

HEH... GEH HEH HEH HEH HEH...
TAKE THAT!
WHO
OOKAY... HE'S NUTS. IGNORE HIM.
...?
SMAK SMAK
BWA HAW HAW HAW!
HMM. I SEE.
A BANQUET WITH HABAKI-DONO'S MEN...?
WELL, I CAN'T LEAVE FOR ANOTHER FOUR DAYS.
BUT WHEN I DO, I'LL GO BY PALANQUIN. I SHOULD BE BACK AT THE MUKŌJIMA DŌJŌ IN... TEN DAYS.
YES, SIR.

I'LL INFORM ABAYAMA-DONO. I'LL LEAVE IMMEDIATE-LY.
WAIT, BARO.
?
.....
.....
IS THERE SOMETHING ELSE, SIR...?
YES... THERE'S ONE OTHER THING I WANT YOU TO DO.
YOU CAN DO IT ON YOUR WAY BACK.
I WANT YOU TO LOOK FOR SOME-ONE.
A... WOMAN.

YES, SIR. NO PROBLEM.
HERE IN KAGA, PROBABLY. OR AT VERY LEAST, SOMEWHERE IN HIDA.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO TAKE EXTRA TIME ON IT. JUST ASK ALONG THE WAY.
IF YOU GET ALL THE WAY TO EDO WITHOUT ANY LEADS, SO BE IT. YOUR SILENCE WILL BE THE MESSAGE.
HOWEVER, IF YOU'RE SUCCESSFUL, I WANT YOU TO COME BACK HERE AND TELL ME. SORRY.
YES, SIR.
WHAT-EVER YOU WISH. SO...WHO IS IT?
HER NAME IS...

...OTONO-
TACHIBANA
MAKIE.

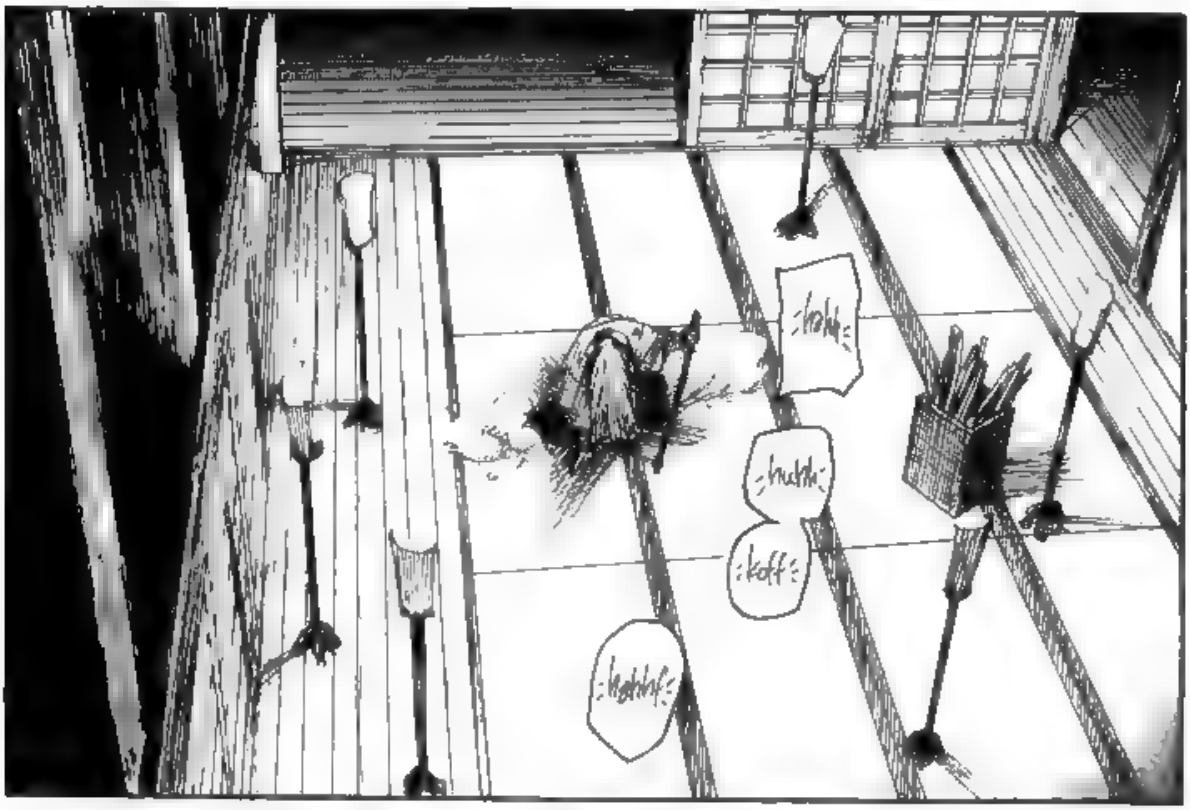

KYAA!
HYAAH!
UNH!
HYAA!

GOD DAMN IT!!

HE WON'T LISTEN TO ANYONE ELSE.
LET'S GO KICK HIS NOSY ASS. C'MON, KOZUE. YOU GOTTA COME WITH US.

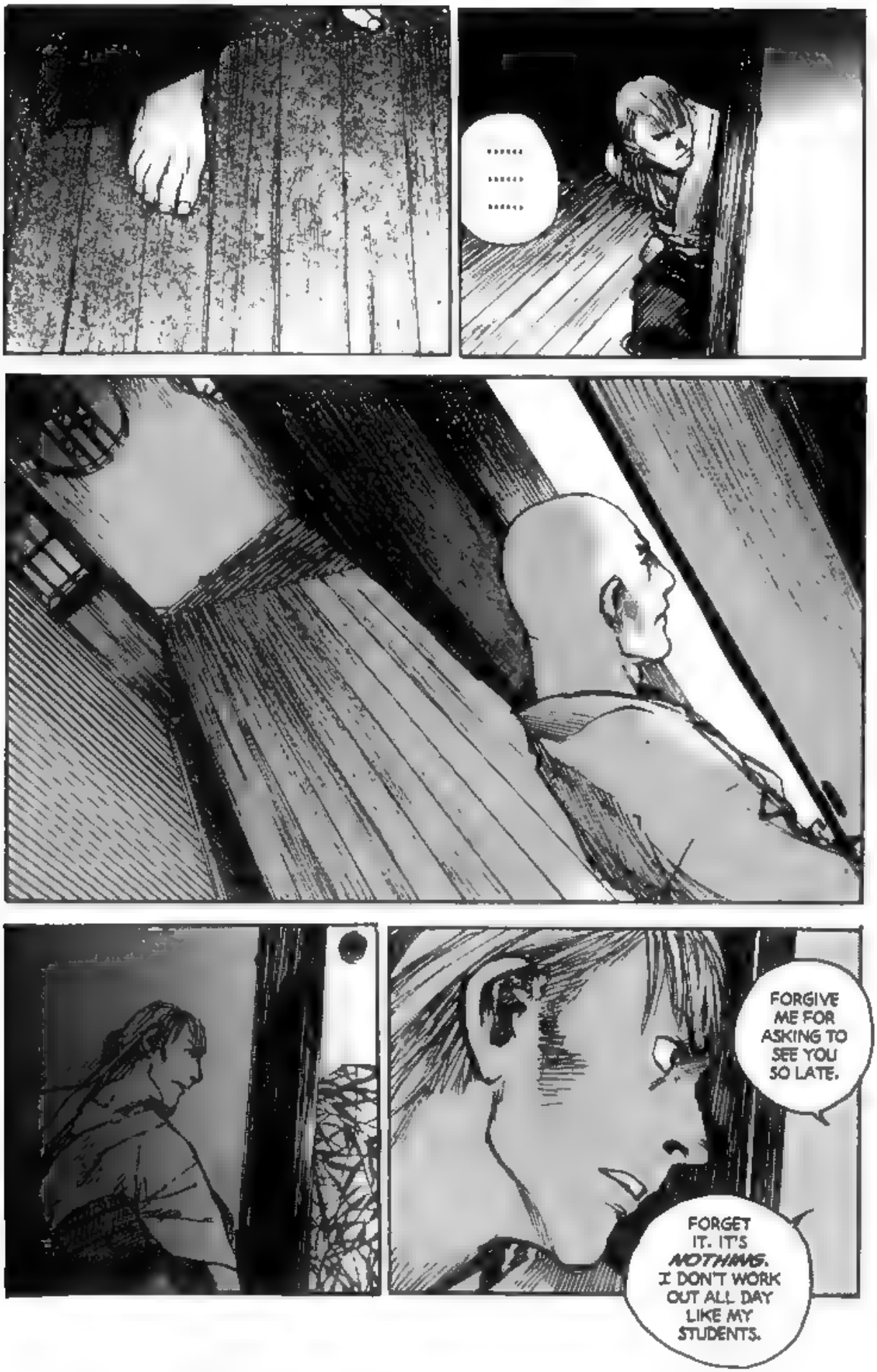
I HAVEN'T SLEPT FOR FIVE FRIGGIN' MINUTES SINCE I WENT TO BED!!
KIYAA!
ENOUGH ALREADY, YOU STUPID ASS-HOLE!

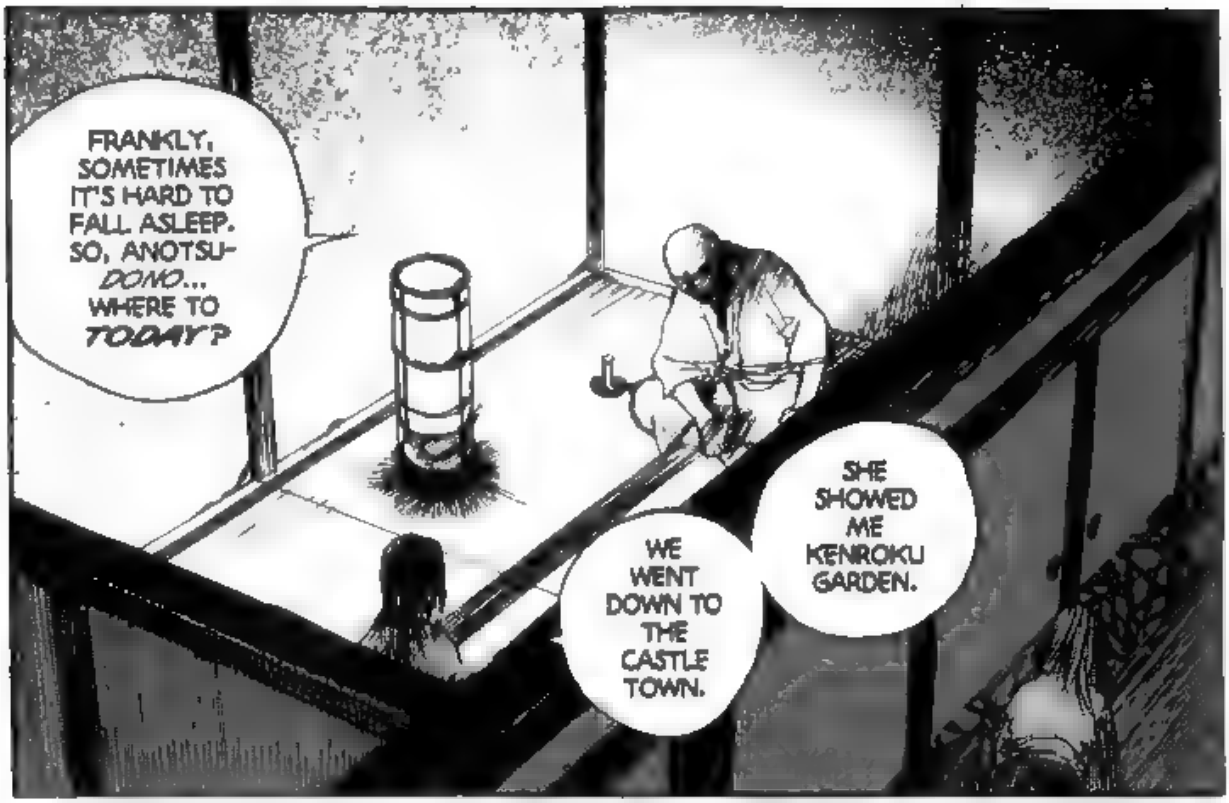
NAW... LET HIM BE.
HE'LL STOP SOON.


:kshh:
:kuhh:
:kuhh:
:kuff:
:kshhf:

GRLSH

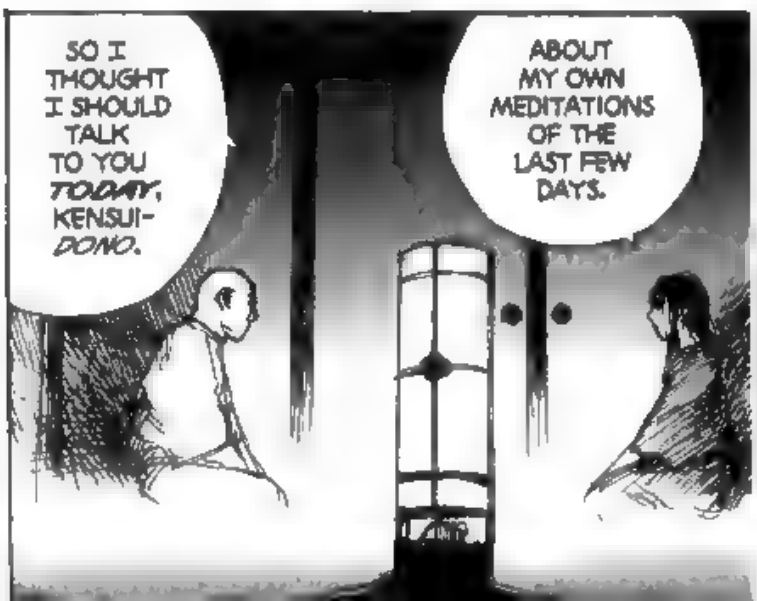
I'VE STILL GOT SOME TIME BEFORE THE BASTARD LEAVES.
BEFORE THEN, I MAKE HIM *FIGHT* ME AGAIN...
I JUST GOTTA *WIN!* *RIGHT?* NO *WAY* I LET THAT FLUKE LAST TIME DECIDE IT ALL!
THIS TIME, BY GOD...
...I'LL *KILL* THAT--
??
MASTER *KENSUI*...?


FORGIVE ME FOR ASKING TO SEE YOU SO LATE.
FORGET IT. IT'S *NOTHING*. I DON'T WORK OUT ALL DAY LIKE MY STUDENTS.


FRANKLY, SOMETIMES IT'S HARD TO FALL ASLEEP. SO, ANOTSU-DONO... WHERE TO TODAY?
WE WENT DOWN TO THE CASTLE TOWN.
SHE SHOWED ME KENROKU GARDEN.

GOOD, GOOD. BY THE WAY... I HEARD THAT AN ITTO-RYŪ MESSENGER CAME.
WHAT NEWS...?

WELL...
IT SEEMS I HAVE TO RETURN TO EDO SOON.


SO I THOUGHT I SHOULD TALK TO YOU TODAY, KENSUI-DONO.
ABOUT MY OWN MEDITATIONS OF THE LAST FEW DAYS.

I HAVE DECIDED TO AGREE TO THE MERGER OF THE SHINGYŌTŌ-*RYŪ* INTO THE ITTŌ-*RYŪ*.
AND TO THAT END, I...CONSENT TO *ALL* OF YOUR CONDITIONS.
MEAN-ING...?
YOUR DAUGHTER... HISOKA-*DONO*.

I ACCEPT HER FOR MY WIFE.
.....
.....!
HOH...!!

CHERRY BLOSSOM

WHERE'S IRIYA...?
HELL, WHO *KNOWS*... BET HE'S NOT COMING.
YEAH? WELL... CAN'T BLAME HIM.
NOT MUCH OF A WEDDING, HUH? NO GUESTS EXCEPT US...
...AND SOME OF THE *OLD MASTER'S* STUDENTS.

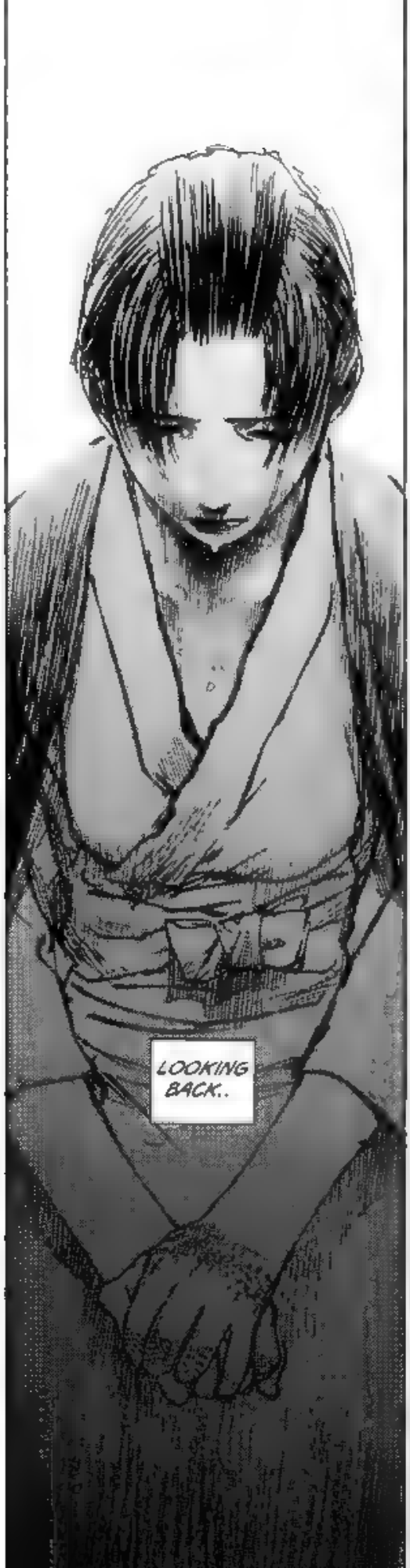
IT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR *US*.
BACK IN EDO, HE'S GOT A THOUSAND FOLLOWERS... THAT'S WHERE THE *REAL* CELEBRATION WILL BE.
OF COURSE WE SHOULDN'T FORGET.....
..*WE'RE* HIS FOLLOW-ERS, TOO, NOW.
.....
.....
SHIT
HISOKA...
.....

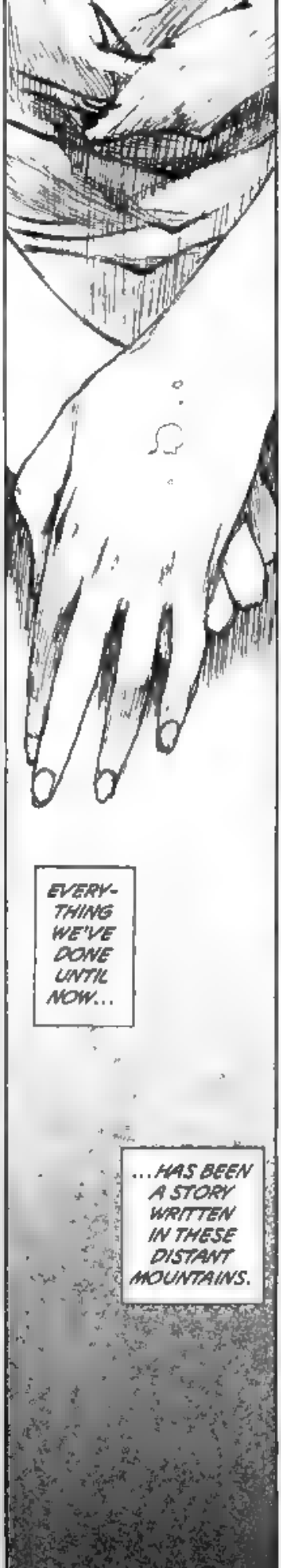
R...
REALLY...
.....
ANOTSU-
SAMA
SAID
THAT...?

WHAT
DO YOU
WISH TO
DO?

I...
I HAVE
NO
REASON
TO
REFUSE.
I'M
WILLING
TO BE...
HIS
WIFE.

.....
.....
I SEE...
.....


LOOKING BACK..


EVERY-THING WE'VE DONE UNTIL NOW...
...HAS BEEN A STORY WRITTEN IN THESE DISTANT MOUNTAINS.

LIVING. DYING. LOVING.

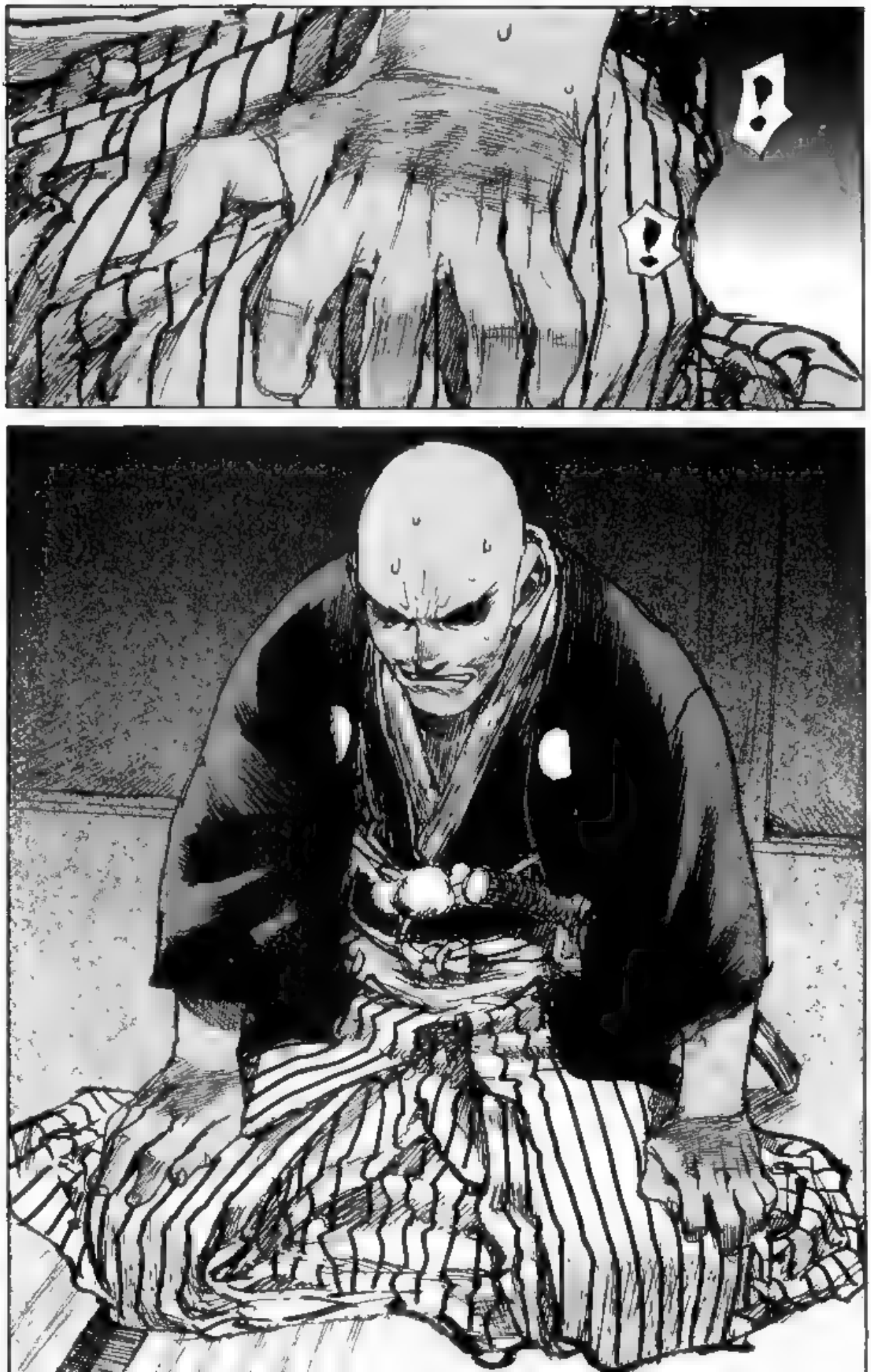
BUT THAT ERA IS OVER NOW.
NO... IT MAY HAVE ENDED LONG, LONG AGO.
POWER SHOULD NOT BE HIDDEN. IT'S TIME TO LET THESE MEN LOOSE ON THE WORLD...
...AND PUT OUR SENSEI'S PHILOSOPHY TO THE TEST!
MAS-TER...?
A MESSENGER FROM THE GOVERN-MENT...?

HMM... WELL, IF HE'S FROM THE AUTHORITIES, I REALLY CAN'T MAKE ANY EXCUSES.
ARE YOU CERTAIN, SIR? I COULD AT LEAST ASK HIM TO COME BACK LATER...
NO, I'LL GO. KOZUE! TAKE OVER FOR ME.
HMM...? YES, SIR.
?
PROSS-PERITY...
IN ALLL... THINGS...

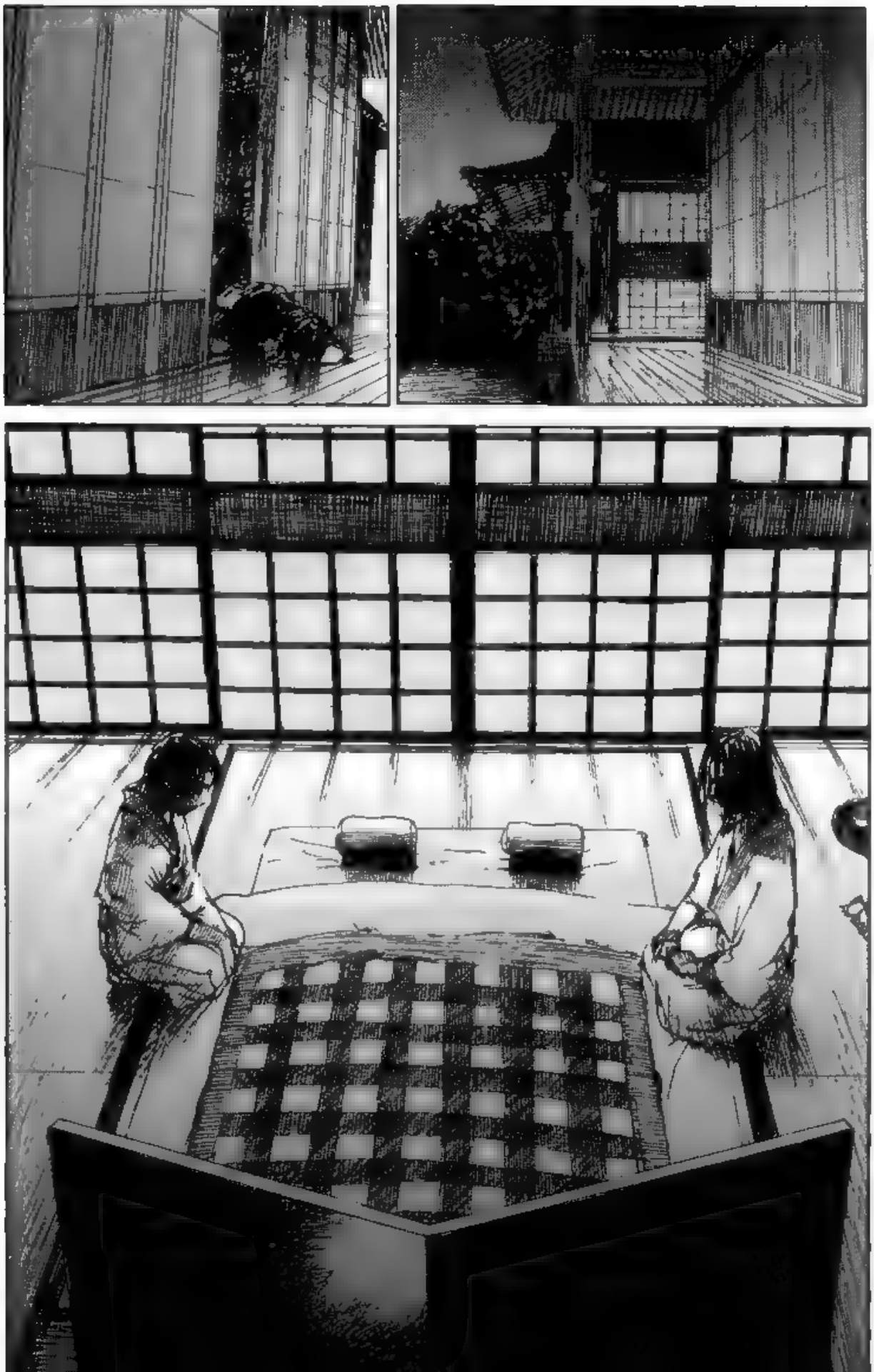
WONDER IF IT'S... OVER?
DON'T GET USED TO IT.
MAN... TWO WHOLE KEGS?!

OH *DEAR*... HOW UNFORTU-NATE.
IT SEEMS THE FEAST HAS ALREADY BEGUN.
WHAT A *RE-GRETTABLE* DUTY I'VE BEEN GIVEN...
...ON SUCH AN *AUSPI-CIOUS* DAY.

SPEAKING PRIVATELY, SIR...
...I CONSIDER IT *REPREHENSIBLE.*
BUT THAT'S NEITHER HERE NOR THERE.
THINK DEEPLY ABOUT THIS MATTER, AND GIVE ME YOUR REPLY.
AFTER ALL, IT'S FOR THE *YOUNG LADY'S* GOOD, AS WELL.
NOW IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME
AH?!
PLEASE WAIT, SIR! I'LL GET A PALANQUIN...
HEAVENS NO! DON'T WORRY ABOUT *THIS* OLD MAN. *GO!* ENJOY YOUR FEAST!



H...
.....
.....
HOW....
...HOW CAN THIS BE?!
....
:sniff:



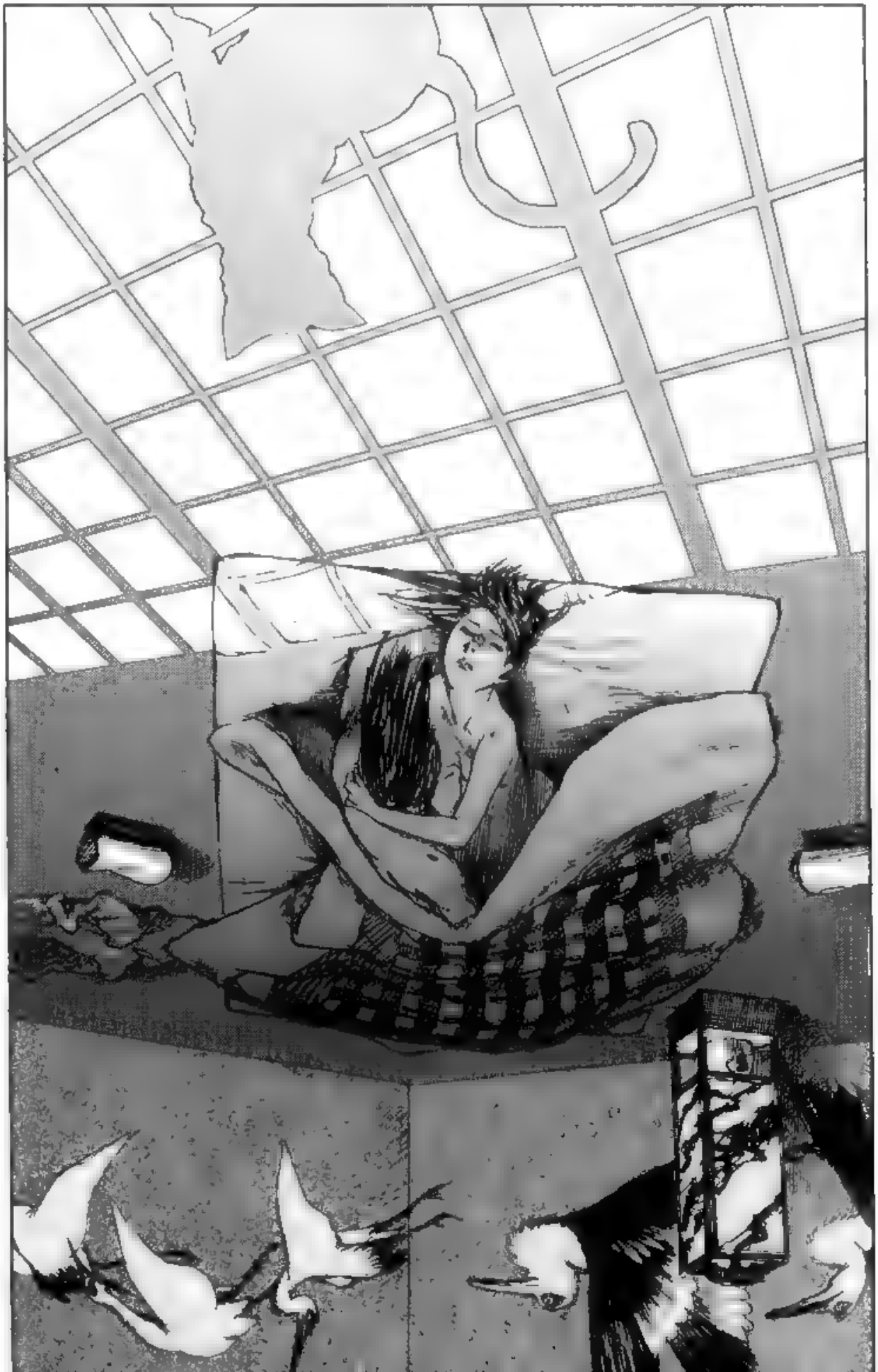
WILL YOU PLEASE PROMISE ME ONE THING...?
.....
ANOTSU-DONO...?
...WHAT IS IT, HISOKA-DONO?
FOR THIS SHORT TIME JUST BEFORE US...
I INTEND TO FORGET ALL TWENTY-FOUR YEARS OF MY LIFE... AND THINK OF NOTHING EXCEPT YOU.
THE FUTURE OF THE DŌJŌ... MY DEPARTED FATHER... KENSUI...
AND SO... I ASK YOU, TOO.

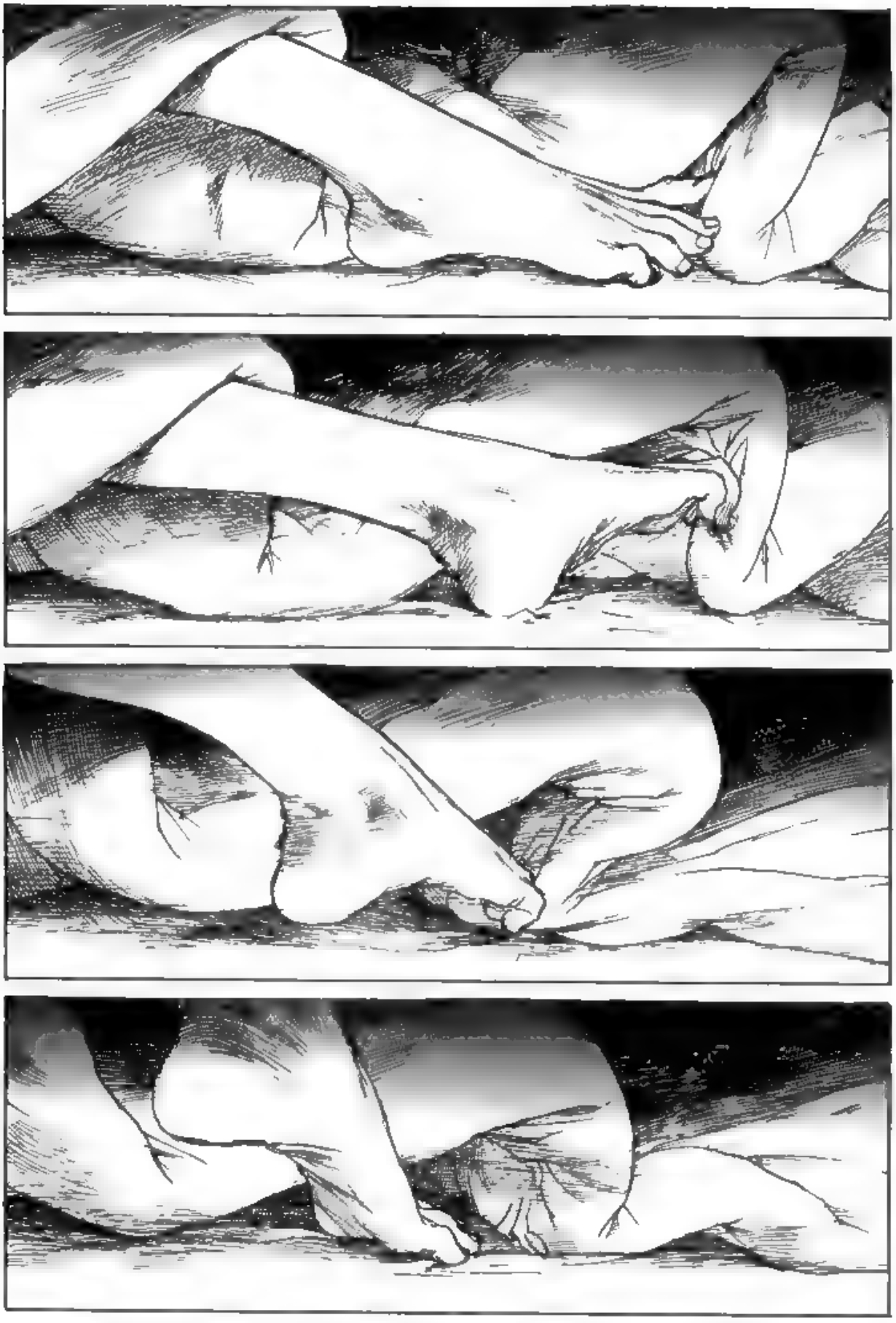
WILL YOU GIVE THESE FEW HOURS BEFORE THE MORNING SUN... TO ME ALONE?
EVEN SHOULD THERE BE... ANOTHER WOMAN IN YOUR MEMORIES.
EVEN AS WE KNEEL HERE TO-GETHER...
...IT'S NOT AS THOUGH WE'RE TWO SOULS PLEDGED IN LOVE.
I KNOW ALL TOO WELL THAT TODAY'S WEDDING WAS... CALCU-LATED.
WEIGHED ON THE SCALES OF YOUR PRIVATE LIFE, AGAINST YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO THE GREATER FAMILY OF YOUR ITTŌ-RYŪ.
AND YET, I WOULD CLING TO YOU THIS ONE NIGHT. I DON'T EXPECT YOU EVER TO TRULY LOVE ME...
...FROM THE BOTTOM OF YOUR HEART...

AND YET...
.....
...YOU'RE THE FIRST MAN I'VE EVER... KNOWN.
AND SO, FOR THIS SHORT TIME...
...I WANT YOU TO FEEL THE SAME TOWARD ME. IS THAT... TOO MUCH TO ASK?
INDEED, THAT WAS MY INTENTION.
.....
I UNDER-STAND.
HOWEVER, ONE THING THAT CONCERNS ME... IS THAT IF I DO MAKE LOVE TO YOU THIS NIGHT...
...IT COULD... OVER-BURDEN YOUR FRAGILE BODY.
ANOTSU-DONO...
YOU SEE A WOMAN WHO HAS SWORN UPON HER SOUL TO MARRY THE LEADER OF THE ITTŌ-RYŪ!

IF I CANNOT EVEN ENDURE LOSING MY VIRGINITY...
...HOW CAN I HOPE TO SURVIVE THE STORMS THAT WILL SOON ENGULF US?
Shift
AS BEFITS THE CREED OF THE ITTŌ-RYŪ...
...TEST THE WORTHINESS OF YOUR WIFE.

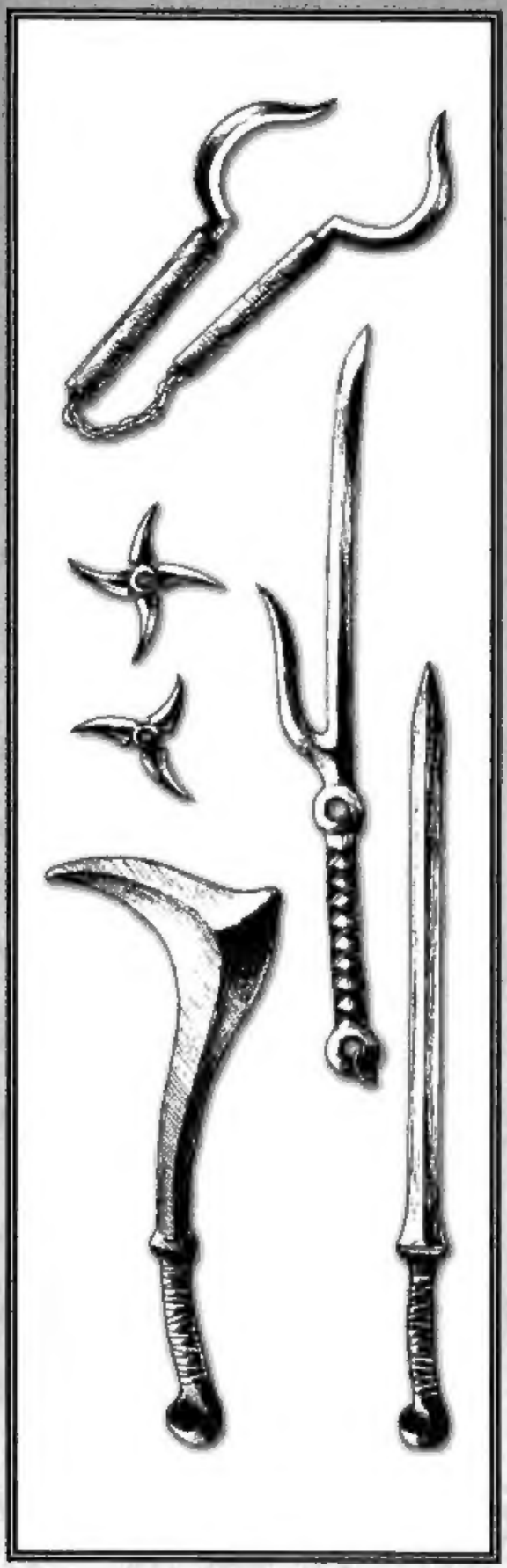
Spike
plat





AAH
KSSHH
TO BE CONTINUED...

GLOSSARY



bushi: a samurai; a member of the warrior class

dōjō: a hall for martial arts training; here, centers for swordsmanship

Hakone, Kobotoke: the names of *seki* (checkpoints) along the major byways. Hakone in particular, guarding the mountain approaches to Edo from the south, was one of the most rigorous in feudal Japan.

Ittō-ryū: the radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa

Kaga: a remote feudal domain on the Japan Sea coast southwest of Edo

kenkyaku: swordsman; *kenshi*

mukago: a glutinous Japanese yam (*dioscorea japonica*). Edible tubercles (small tubers) grow in the axils of the stem.

rōnin: a masterless samurai

ryō: a gold piece

ryū: a sword school

sekisho: checkpoint regulating travel from Edo to other *han* (feudal domains). All travelers had to submit papers at official checkpoints along the main highways in and out of Edo.

sensei: a teacher, a master

tegata (tsūkō tegata): official travel pass for transiting *sekisho*

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

You'd think that Manji, the immortal swordsman, would have dispatched just about every sinister personality in feudal Japan on his mission to slay a thousand evil men, but instead of thinning the vicious herd, he's only shaken loose the most vicious and depraved. Now, Manji and his pal Magatsu are on the trail of one of the baddest apples in the barrel, Shira, old enemy of Manji – and a one-handed enemy, courtesy of the immortal's blade. But while Manji and Magatsu are hunting Shira, the crafty killer has hired a pack of hunters of his own, and if he can't kill Manji, he's hoping for the next best thing: to cut Manji to pieces on a daily basis!

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